

THE JOURNAL  
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# GAMES

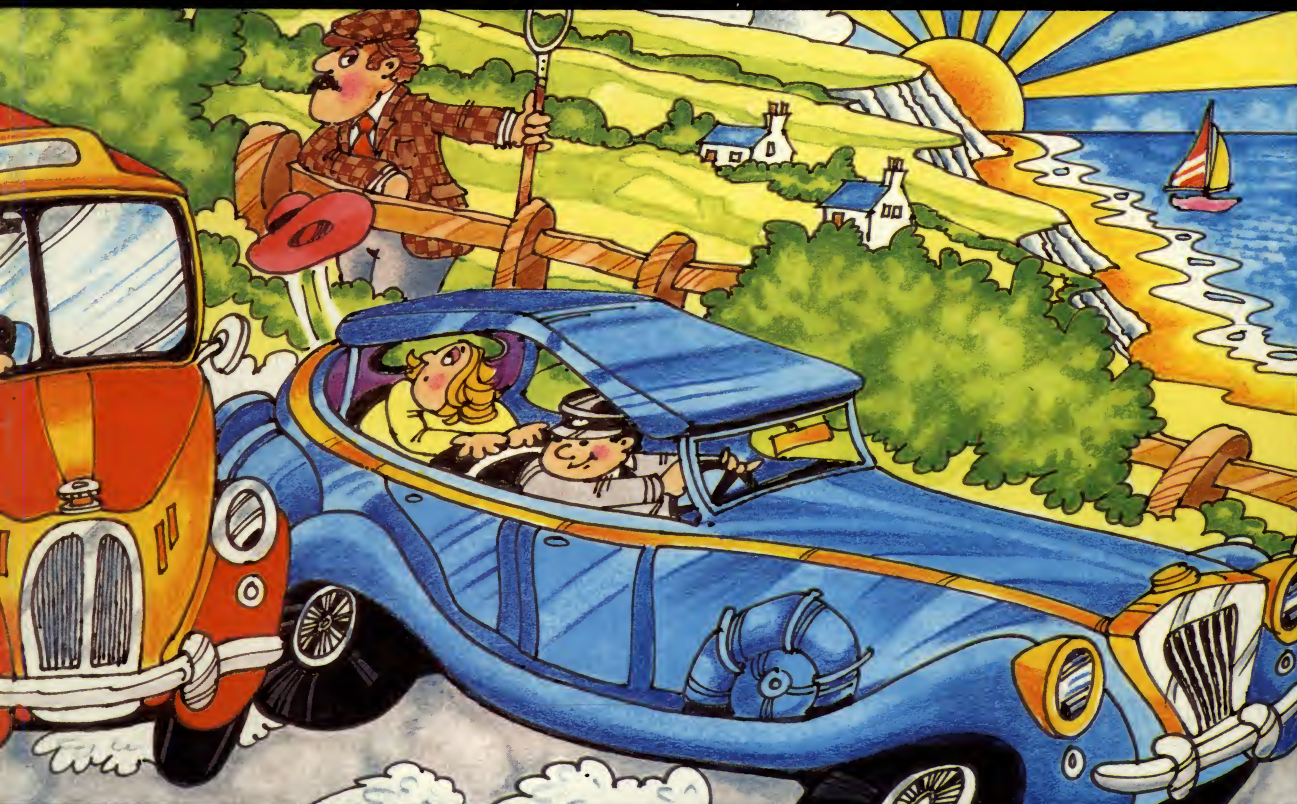
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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

**Batman Special • Napoleon at War • HeroQuest in review**



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# GAME

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# UPFRONT

£1.95

Sorry. Increasing the cover price is the last thing any publisher wants to do, but quite frankly, we have no choice. It's either that, or die. As you can see, British advertisers have not exactly been beating a path to our door. We are not a house magazine with a big games company behind us, or a computer company to prop us up. As a specialist magazine we are therefore dependent on you, the reader, for support.

That's the bad news. Here's the good news. Commencing, er, very shortly, and providing sales and subscriptions continue to increase, we hope to be able to provide an additional eight pages to enable us to cover computer games (but not 'shoot 'em ups'), and to extend our coverage of general games. Also, we are looking at the possibility of a subsidiary company to publish games.

The decision to go down this road is based on the vast number of letters we get from readers complaining that their tastes are not being catered for in the UK market. Many of them have designed games themselves, only to be confronted with a wall of indifference when they submit them for professional assessment.

Subscriptions will remain the same for the present, though prices will be reviewed at the end of December.

## DEAR MARJORIE

The number of enquiries we receive along the lines of 'I've got this great game, how do I go about it getting it published?' has now reached such epidemic proportions that SOMETHING MUST BE DONE. We've even had several prototypes arrive through the post. Quite frankly, with the best will in the world, we simply don't have enough time to give your efforts the attention they deserve. As for suggesting sure-fire publishers, if we knew the answer to that one we'd be designing games ourselves and spending the winter on a Caribbean beach, rather than fannying around in West London wondering where the next 10p for the vending machine is coming from. However, based on our limited experience, we can offer you a few guidelines:

Before you do anything, lodge a copy of the rules with a solicitor, or simply mail a copy to yourself and leave unopened. This will ensure you have some form of copyright protection. Rip-offs are far less prevalent than imagined, but it's wise to play safe.

Never send an unsolicited prototype to a games company. Again this isn't because you'll be ripped off, but more that your

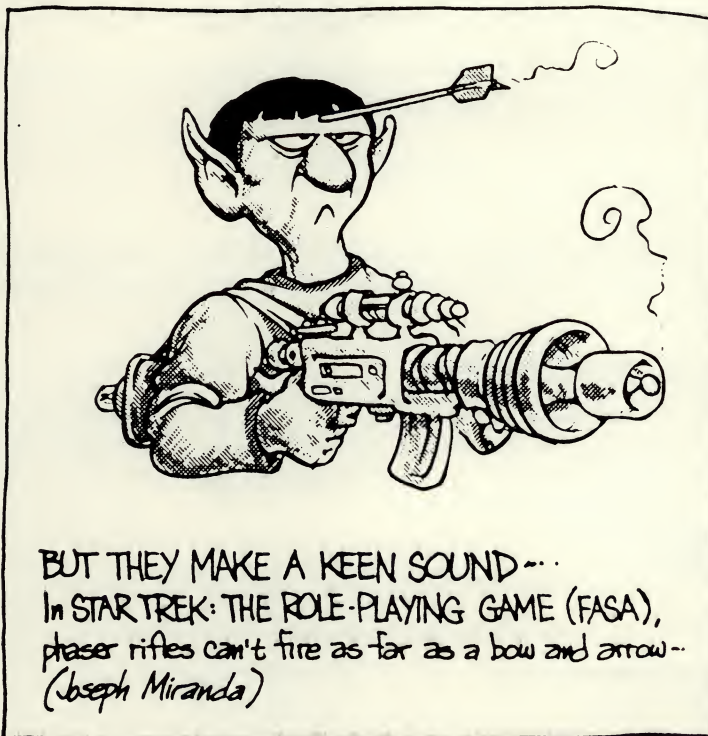
game will probably be buried under a mountain of similar efforts.

Do send a synopsis of your game, making sure to include the number of players, playing time, complexity, perceived market and age group. Always send a SAE, and mark your missive for the attention of 'Product Development'. Before you take this momentous step, though, have a look on the shelves of your local games shop. Note the publishers, check what sort of games they are publishing. Ask yourself if your game will fit into their line. Sending a war game to Waddingtons, for example, would not enhance your chances of getting your game published.

As to the game itself, bear in mind that the theme is all-important. Doubtless, if you're a plumber, then plumbing must seem like a fascinating subject for a game. Unfortunately, the rest of the world is unlikely to agree. Try to choose something that is likely to last. A game about Rotweiller dogs biting people might have been okay this summer, but next year you'd be dismissed as a lunatic. Fantasy games, rolegames and wargames are almost the exclusive preserve of American companies (with the exception of Games Workshop who have their own in-house designers) but don't let this put you off.

Assuming you've been asked to submit your prototype, make sure that it is the best quality you can afford. With so many games to go through, the test team will quickly get impatient if it's not up to scratch. Remember: your game should be a pleasure to play. The really crucial part is the rules. Even professional companies have problems with these. The only sure way to test their completeness is to find a group of friends (or strangers), who haven't played the game before. Have them sit down and play the game using only your rules. Ask them to make notes and then leave them to their own devices. You'll be amazed to discover that Japanese Aircraft Carriers can be sunk by a bowman provided he's got a +3 modifier.

Even if your game does get published, the standard royalty is only 5% of the trade price so don't go ordering the Roller just yet. And whatever you do, *don't* go into manufacturing unless you've got a bank manager who likes games and is willing to give you an unsecured loan of £100 000. In which case, we *would* like to hear from you. G1



BUT THEY MAKE A KEEN SOUND...  
In STAR TREK: THE ROLE-PLAYING GAME (FASA),  
phaser rifles can't fire as far as a bow and arrow...  
(Joseph Miranda)



## REVIEWS

## GENERAL GAMES

## HEROQUEST

DESIGNED BY  
STEPHEN BAKERPUBLISHED BY  
HASBRO BRADLEY

PRICE £21.99

\*\*\*½



Expensive? No, for you immediately see what you are exchanging your hard earned blood, sweat, and tears for. The huge full colour box contains thirty-five 30mm Citadel figures of varying types, all suitable for painting (but great as they are) along with fifteen pieces of furniture and twenty one doors. The artwork on the boards, tiles, screens, and cards is from the Games Workshop stable and is of the quality we have come to expect from them.

**HeroQuest** is a translation of concepts popularised in fantasy role-playing to a boardgame format. Two to five players may take part and the game seems to work well with any combination, including even two players. Whatever the number, one player gets to play Morcar, the evil wizard, who controls all the monsters in the game. The other players each take on the rôle of one of the four adventurers available – barbarian, dwarf, elf, and wizard. For the adventurers, the object is to delve into the darkness of Morcar's dungeon and complete a specific task; this could be rescue, revenge, or retrieval of lost objects. Successful adventurers can take part in later missions and improve their abilities by spending money they've gained to purchase items of equipment. Morcar's task is much more simple – slaughter those innocents!

The game comes with a quest book which sets out fourteen missions of varying degrees of difficulty for the players. Beyond this you need to make up your own ad-

ventures, but this is both a simple and extremely pleasurable task.

**HeroQuest** plays simply but effectively. The results of melee are determined by rounds of attacks and parries using special combat dice. Magical spells also

figure and are fully explained on the cards which accompany them. When not being pressured, the adventurers may search areas for traps, secret doors, and treasure. Looking for the latter has its disadvantages since this sometimes alerts a 'wandering monster' to the adventurers'

## REVIEW SECTION

Welcome aboard Ian Livingstone, who will be contributing regularly to these pages. To give you an idea of his eccentric tastes Ian is our 'desert island' guest (see page 20), perhaps the first such visitor to arrive by supertanker.

Lots of new games this month in what looks like the heavyweight boxing championship of the UK, with three of our biggest companies putting up contenders. All have something to offer in their differing ways.

The two candidates for Game of the Month could hardly be more different: **Topple** and **Main Battle Tank**. We chose the latter because of the wealth of detail and the huge amount of development that went into this game.

In the rolegame section we say a holy hullo to Batman, with not only a look at the new game but also a review of some of the peripheral products. **G**

## Star Ratings

\*\*\*\*\*

Top class game. Highly recommended

\*\*\*\*

Very good game. Worth buying

\*\*\*

Worth a look

\*\*

Only if the subject interests you



A true turkey



presence. But then those greedy little dwarfs get all they deserve, don't they?

A nice twist is that nothing is placed on the board until it falls into an adventurer's line of sight. Thus the good guys tend to turn corners straight into the arms of Orc guards, open the door to a room full of horrid mummies and flee down the corridor which just happens to be covered in spear traps.

There's little more I can tell you about the game without spoiling it for you, save to mention a few 'flaws': If the adventurers co-operate (as mine did) they'll soon find a cunning little strategy which ensures they will never fall foul of a trap. They can also make sure that the barbarian (the best fighter) will always be the one to fight a wandering monster. And finally, as a team, they can really mangle all but the most concentrated onslaught of Morcar's forces.

The rules are not quite clear on how to handle spells cast out of turn. The wizard and elf may cast spells on themselves at any time, rather than just on their turn. We decided that a spell cast between turns cost the adventurer his next action phase; two spells cast between turns cost the next action *and* movement phase; three spells cast between turns cost the next *two* action phases and one movement phase. We applied the same logic to the consumption of potions between turns.

Having noted these 'flaws', I should say that expansion kits are planned for **Heroquest**, the first, **Advanced Heroquest** is being produced by Games Workshop and may well address some of the problems we found. Our group was of the opinion that **Heroquest** is a good game waiting to be a great one. Perhaps the expansion kits will do the trick. Again returning to the price, lest you think it is expensive, it should be emphasised that this is a *quality* game. The components are chunky and pleasant to handle. Some of the pieces, such as the fireplace, the torture rack, and the alchemist's bench are delightful. The 50mm gargoyle is probably most impressive.

I'd rather pay £21.99 for a game which not only plays well but looks good too, rather than pay £9.99 for something that falls to bits the second time you take it out of the box. Wouldn't you?

*Philip A Murphy*

*A variant for this game, correcting some of the problems mentioned in this review, will appear in the next issue.*

## THE NEW DUNGEON! GAME

DESIGNED BY  
DAVID R MEGARRY

PUBLISHED BY  
TSR

PRICE £10.95



**Dungeon!** first saw the light of day back in 1975, as one of the first releases from the fledgling TSR, and has since shifted a hefty half million units in its original form. In recent years it has become unobtainable but TSR, in their frenzy of reviving and revising old products have reissued it for a whole new generation.

**The New Dungeon!** is basically the same as the old **Dungeon!**, which is to say that it plays very much like a simplified **Basic D&D** on a board. Players take on the part of one of eighteen 'heroes' and wander around the six levels of the dungeon, killing monsters and grabbing their treasure in an effort to be the first to return to the 'main staircase' (the centre of the board) with 20 000 gold pieces. That is all there is to it.

The components are of a high quality: the board is huge and in bright colours, although the corridors are sometimes confusingly laid-out and the doors are hard to distinguish, being black on a brown background. Different levels are denoted by different colours, which correspond to the colours on the backs of the cards relevant to that level. These cards are small but nicely printed, with all relevant information clearly visible. Six figures are also supplied, moulded in lurid purple plastic; all male, despite several female 'heroes' among the hero cards.

The rules are simple. Every character has a set movement with which to explore the dungeon. If they enter a room, the monster card for that room is turned over and they have to fight it. If they win, they get the treasure. If they lose, they may be wounded, miss a go, lose some of the treasure they've already collected or even die – which actually means that they just have to start again. Combat is very easy

and fast yet works well, although the rule book must be kept on hand to work out the effects of monsters' blows on players' pieces.

As the players venture to the deeper levels of the dungeon, the monsters get tougher and death becomes more likely, but the rewards are richer for the successful. It is possible for two or more players to gang up on a particularly tough monster – one which has perhaps defeated other players earlier in the game, and has thus accumulated a fair stack of treasure. Players can also ambush each other as they pass in corridors, in order to steal treasure or to stop another player from winning.

Gameplay is straightforward, and there is little strategy involved. In fact, the game relies almost too much on the rolls of dice or the turn of a card, but this does not detract from its 'fun' potential. **Dungeon!** is clearly designed as a family game, although the likelihood of one's character dying, sometimes frequently, detracts from its suitability for younger players who could easily get frustrated and emotional. It works best with as many players as possible, and in fact the only reason to stick to the suggested maximum of six is that only six figures are supplied with the game.

*James Wallis*

### CHARTS

#### General Games

- ① Family Business (Spielbreaks)
- ② Pass the Pigs (MB)
- ③ Scrabble (Spears)
- ④ Monopoly (Waddingtons)
- ⑤ Hol's Der Geier (Ravensburger)
- ⑥ Schoko & Co (Schmidt Spiele)
- ⑦ Pictionary (Tonka)
- ⑧ Gumshoe (Sleuth)
- ⑨ Orient Express (Just Games)
- ⑩ Oppression (Midson Holdings)

*Chart supplied by Just Games.*



# INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

DESIGNED BY  
**TERRY GOODCHILD**

PUBLISHED BY  
**LAMBOURNE GAMES**

PRICE £17.99



## Stop Press:

### AUSTRALIA v ENGLAND

One day match: Australia beat England  
by 6 wickets

#### ENGLAND

G Gooch lbw Holland	55
G Fowler c O'Donnell b Border	104
C Tavare run out	4
D Gower lbw O'Donnell	34
M Gatting b O'Donnell	39
A Lamb not out	37
P Downton b Lawson	3
I Botham not out	30
Extras	10

Total (55 overs) 6 wickets 276

Bowling figures: Lawson 11-1-46-1;  
McDermott 11-1-47-0; Holland  
11-1-46-1; O'Donnell 11-1-50-2;  
Border 11-0-82-1

#### AUSTRALIA

G Wood lbw Gooch	74
K Wessels lbw Botham	37
D Boon run out	15
A Border b Gooch	60
D Hookes not out	54
G Ritchie not out	34
Extras	3

Total (53.1 overs) 4 wickets 277

Bowling figures: Cowans 11-0-67-0;  
Foster 10-0-39-0; Botham 11-0-66-1;  
Gooch 10.1-0-43-2; Emburey  
11-1-63-0

Suffering from post Test match depression, I decided to give this game a whirl in the hope of achieving a more satisfactory result than Gower's lot appear capable of. Sadly, this game lives up to its claim of being an accurate simulation. Hence the result you see here.

The game system is at once both simple and yet capable of realising many of the

nuances that make cricket the game it is. This particular package contained eight international teams, all of which are updated constantly. The player cards reflect both batting, fielding, and, where appropriate, bowling ability. Dice are rolled for the batting and fielding team simultaneously. The results are cross referenced on various charts, in the batsman's case according to the batting mode, so they can choose to play defensively, normal, go looking for runs, or hit out. To discover what kind of delivery the batsman was confronted with you simply refer to the bowler's card and read off the die roll. In Foster's case good length balls would be despatched on a roll of 7 or 8, while Jarvis would probably need a double 6. Unless batting in the latter mode, overs consist of only three balls. This is designed to give a composite result and also speed up play (a 55 over game takes about 90 minutes once you get used to the system).

The batsman has a better chance of hitting the ropes when he has 'got his eye in', that is, when you have rolled the requisite number. In practice this means that Botham will have to roll a 6, while Gatting, in current form, would probably need a 92. At the start of play, weather charts are consulted to determine the state

of the pitch. Bowler's deliveries are modified accordingly.

## ASHES TO ASHES

The production of the game is a bit rough but this is more than compensated for by the amount of detail contained within. And if you're a purist who detests the one-day blight, there's an expansion kit included in this set to replay an entire Test Match. Have a few sandwiches at the ready, for completion can take up to ten hours. If you're only interested in the one-day game then **One-Day International** is available separately at a price of £11.95. This really is a game for cricket fans rather than gamers *per se*. If you fall into both categories then its acquisition is a must. As well as playing solitaire, it is an excellent two player game as there are any number of strategic decisions to make, most notably the batting modes, or if you're the fielding side, which bowler to use. As for the current state of play, I suggest any readers in a similar mood of gloom send off right away for the all-time greats and stick Hutton and Compton *et al* out there in the middle to combat Border's boys. It's the only way we're going to beat the blighters.

Brian Walker

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# VISA



## TOPPLE

DESIGNED BY  
FRANK THIMBAULT

PUBLISHED BY  
WADDINGTONS

PRICE £8.99



This unusual and hugely entertaining release was first published some five years ago to general indifference. Perhaps this is a game whose time has come, for it certainly deserves a better fate than a premature namecheck in our RIP feature.

The object of this particular exercise is to play pieces of your colour on various parts of the podium thereby scoring points, and of course, without causing a topple. The position where you place your piece is determined by die roll. A throw of 6 gets you a free choice. Scores are calculated by the number of exposed



(that is, on top) pieces you have on a line of five or more, or, when you add to a pile consisting of four or more. Should the former coincide with the latter, you then score both ways. If you should have the misfortune to send the whole shooting match clattering down around you, much to the amusement of your opponents, everyone else scores three points.

There doesn't appear to be anything in the rules to prevent some unscrupulous rotter deliberately causing a collapse when ahead, though we trust none of our

rolling contest. Notably trying to unbalance the thing when you have a lead. Dexterity too plays a part, though not as large as you may think. Despite sending the contraption tumbling a couple of times (wind assisted, I swear), I was still able to win comfortably, to the general consternation of all concerned. Like darts and snooker, dexterity is considerably enhanced by a few jars of one's favourite beverage. So there you have it, **Topple** – the idea game after a tippie.

Brian Walker

readers would stoop to such a tactic. The game is played in a number of rounds decided by the players. A round ends when there is a topple, or when all the pieces have been placed.

### TIME FOR A TOPPLE

Despite the simple concept, there are, without getting carried away, enough strategic options to make the game something other than a die

## JUMP THE QUEUE

DESIGNED BY  
WOLFGANG REIDESSER

PUBLISHED BY  
J W SPEARS

PRICE £6.99



Somebody in your games group has just won the BIG game of the evening and it's still not time to put the cat out. What to do? The end-of-evening-game, of course. There are quite a few of these around at the moment and **Jump the Queue** would not embarrass your collection. It's simple, good fun, and fast moving.

Each player owns five different vehicles which he will attempt to move through a queue of traffic built up by all the players. Movement is decided by the roll of the dice, but before you cringe back in horror

let me explain that there are choices to be made. For example, the die roll may allow a player to move either his scooter, limousine, or bubble car (what's a bubble car, Dad? Well son, it was a funny three-wheeled car that was made in the 1960s and was designed in such a way as to virtually ensure death to its driver in any head-on collision, and of course it's now a collectors item). The die tells you which vehicle to move, but it has to move to the next empty space, thus if there is a continuous queue it could move quite a long way. As the game develops, gaps appear in the queue as the vehicles jump along. The limo is the least likely vehicle to move but it scores the most points if, and when, it reaches the parking zone. The game ends when at least one of each type of vehicle has parked – a variable condition that adds to the potential strategies. The only real criticism I have of the game is the Joker face on the die. Its effect is far too powerful. It allows a player to move three vehicles on a turn. One of the players in our group rolled it five times in a row and so romped home. However, if you amend this rule so that a player may move any *one* vehicle, it re-



duces the luck element significantly while retaining the fun element.

The quality of the components is good, as are the graphics. Curiously, the designer of the game does not get a credit (one of my pet hates), though the illustrator does. Don't be put off by the suggested age of '6 to adult'. This is a game which definitely suits all ages and is 'well worth a look'.

Ian Livingstone



# SPACE HULK

DESIGNED BY  
RICHARD HALLIWELL

PUBLISHED BY  
GAMES WORKSHOP

PRICE £19.99



Despite, or perhaps because of, the difficulties in obtaining a copy of this game (see footnote), this particular play session was one we looked forward to – especially when we opened the box and noted the high component quality. By the time we read the rule book and the mission sheet we'd practically given the game five stars already. Sadly, fifteen minutes and two scenarios later our hopes, and the space marines, were in tatters. The problem here is play balance, the element in a game where both players have an even chance at the outset. Curiously though, such a notion does not appear to be a 'problem' to Games Workshop. When I pointed out my conclusion the response from a Workshop employee was: 'Ah yes, but we play to see how well the marines can do and then switch sides.' Maybe I'm in the wrong business, but if I took a

prototype of a game like this along to a company my guess is their response would be something like: 'Interesting, but we're looking for *finished* games.'

Maybe such fine points are irrelevant as the first print run has already sold out, proving that the Workshop children will buy anything so long as their logo is on it. But who is to say that they can't make games which will appeal to an older market without alienating their young fans? Why not take on board some of the ideas contained in the fun SPI games such as *Dawn of the Dead*, or others like *The Creature That Ate Sheboygan*. The qualities these games (and the company) lacked are the very elements Workshop have – first class components and a top notch design studio. What they *did* have, and which Workshop don't, were good games designers. On the evidence of this, and his earlier *Chainsaw Warrior*, Richard Halliwell has some way to go before he can be described as such.

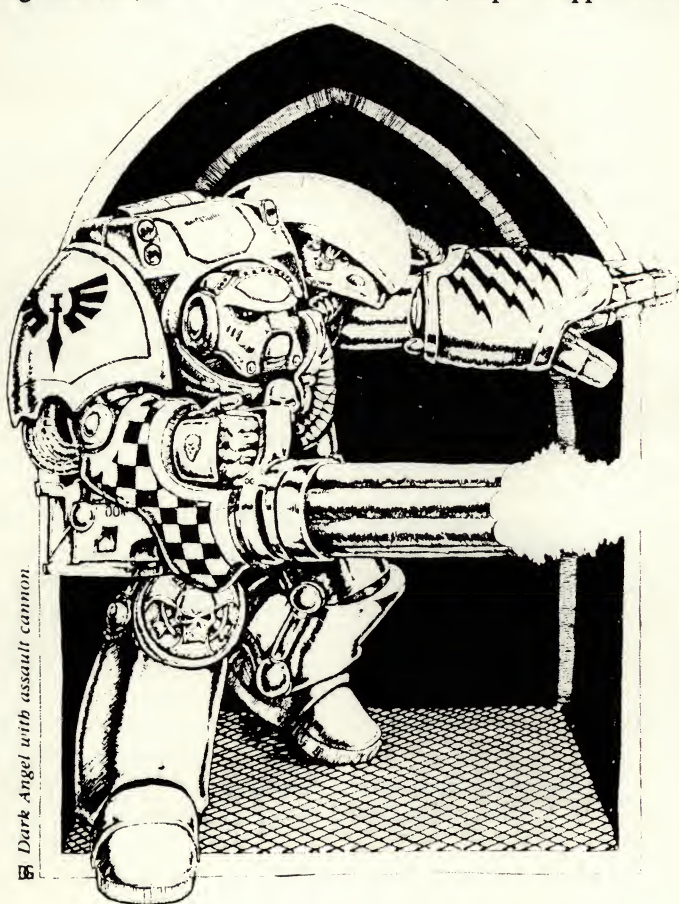
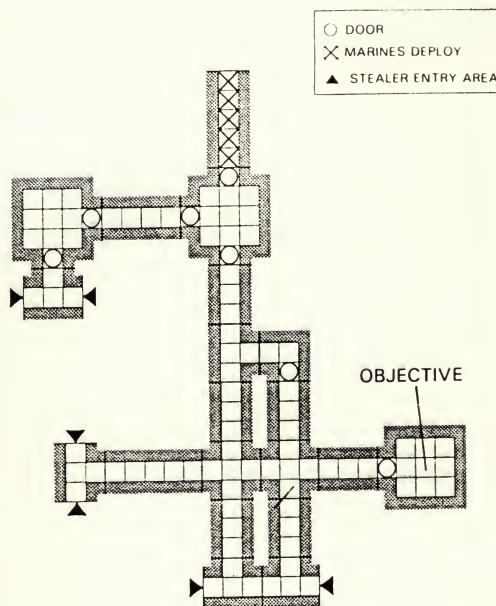
Meanwhile, back on the warship *Windrush*, the shit has really hit the oxygen regeneration unit. A floating Space Hulk has been spotted so the marines have to check it out and 'do whadda man's gotta do'. Sure, the plot's ripped off from *Alien*,

itself a rip off of *It Came From Outer Space*, but who cares? For the purposes of this review we played the aptly named *Suicide Mission*, and *Rescue*. There is no board in the conventional sense. The playing area is made of interlocking tiles, the pattern of which vary according to mission. All this is explained in the exemplary booklet *Missions and Background*. This is well written and goes a long way to providing a suitable atmosphere for the game. So you've set up for your first game of *Space Hulk*. Die in hand, ready to dazzle your opponent with your strategic expertise, when suddenly, *it happened!* The corridor, which a few seconds ago contained half a dozen of the Imperium's finest, now looks like a strawberry jam jar and you find yourself frothing at the mouth and whining your head off about play balance. The mission book is more subtle: 'Let the slaughter commence.' Fine, buy this game if you like fiddling around with toy soldiers (no letters, please) or you're prepared to embark on the not too difficult task of correcting some of the flaws contained within the impressive looking box. If however, you expect a finished product then look elsewhere. There are some great ideas buried deep in the bowels of *Space Hulk*, but at the moment ideas is all they are.

Brian Walker

### Footnote

Although we were promised a review copy of this game several times by Games Workshop, none materialised. We ended up actually buying a copy (the thought of it!). The upshot of all this was we missed the deadline for our last issue and were thus unable to review the game as promised. Our apologies to all our readers.





## VARIANTS

# Four's company

**Stuart Dagger**

*One of the more forlorn sights in the world of games has long been that of three bridge players looking for a fourth; to that can now be added four boardgamers wondering what to do with a fifth.*

So many of the best games of the past couple of years are for four players: *Die Macher*, *McMulti*, *Schoko & Co*. Does Germany have a law whereby groups of more than four gamers constitute riotous assembly? Our sessions normally end up with five or six, and this gives us the obvious problem: all three of these games are popular with all our group, and so we either have to wait until excess of work or lack of babysitters causes enough people to cry off, or arrange a game quietly and decide whom not to tell about it. What follows is an attempt at an alternative solution. I am afraid that all three suggestions involve making some extra components, and so if you don't like doing that sort of thing you can stop reading now. However, it is simple stuff I promise you. I would not tackle it myself otherwise.

## McMulti

This one is easy, though it has taken me several years to realise it. As a mathematician I know that if four players use a square board, and symmetry is important, six players need a hexagonal board. So, on several occasions down the years (I bought the original version, *Crude*, when *Games & Puzzles* enthused about it back in 1977) I have doodled with hexagons, trying to get a simple board which works in the way that the square one does. It is not easy. It is also not necessary. The penny finally dropped a couple of months ago: symmetry of *shape* is not important, it is just a means of getting symmetry of *operation*, and it is not the only one. For



this game a three by two rectangle works perfectly well. A player's dice rolls now affect the three players who share the long side of the rectangle plus the player opposite – four of the six players, as opposed to three of the four with the usual board. If you have five players rather than six, you do what you would do if you were a player short in the four player game: roll the dice for the missing player so as to preserve the symmetry. Both *Crude* and *McMulti* are generously supplied with pieces, and so you should not need to make new ones; all you need do to give the game more flexibility is make an extension for the board.

Of course, all this would be pointless if the play of the game suffered as a result of the extra players, but it shouldn't. The retail price mechanism balances itself: more players are selling oil and thus causing falls in price, but more are there to throw the doubles which make it go up again. The one thing which will be affected is the speed (per complete turn) at which the cost of oil wells goes up, and here I suggest that you slow things down. In the four player game the first well costs 10, the second 20 and so on. With the extra players I think you will find it better to have two at each price rather than one: so the first *two* wells cost 10, the next *two* 20 and so on. This will reduce the luck inherent in this part of the game.

## Schoko & Co

In GI #1 Alan Moon suggested that this game could handle 5–8 players provided you have two sets to supply the pieces. I think seven or eight would prove unwieldy, but I am sure it can take up to six, and you can get by without the second set.

Do as Alan suggested in issue one, and extend the events deck. You don't need to make extra cards: just a list indexed to part of a deck of playing cards. As for what the extra events should be, Alan gave some ideas and you can also have flu epidemics in the factories, new cars for sales staff, secretaries taking (paid) maternity leave and government grants for small businesses. You should find that you already have enough chocolate bars for six players, and the Express deck is no problem if you do as Alan suggested and don't use it. The stand-up factories are not really needed, and making a couple of small supplementary boards giving the extra players storage spaces is easy. That just leaves the *wertpapier* and the playing pieces representing the various categories of workers, and here you raid the other games in your collection. For the workers I have commandeered the armies from *Supremacy*. They are a suitable size, come in the right colours, and using them means that I finally get some value for my money. (I found that standing the box in



the corner while I cursed the designer didn't really give enough entertainment for 29 quid.) **Risk!** pieces would also work nicely. For the *wertpapier* use game money or chips. All that remains is to decide how many extra workers and *wertpapier* certificates to supply for the additional players, and here you just have to trust to judgement and the tastes of the group you play with: my lot think that in the game as supplied there are too few secretaries, bookkeepers and *wertpapier* certificates as it is. I suspect that your decision won't matter too much. **Schoko & Co** is a game whose strength is its central mechanism (the bidding for cocoa and the auctioning of contracts) and provided you don't touch that, you can alter the trimmings quite a bit and still have a good game. Very much one for making up house rules to suit your own likes and dislikes.

### Die Macher

**Schoko & Co** is a game which almost invites tinkering; **Die Macher** does not, and so I approach it with some nervousness. It has clearly been put together with such care that any changes are unlikely to be for the better. Moreover, the playing pieces are such a pleasure to use that I am loath to start cluttering things up with home-made ones of my own. So the aim here is to squeeze in a fifth player without spoiling either the game's mechanisms or its looks. Note, just the one extra player this time: I think you would change the game too much if you went beyond that.

The first thing to decide is the identity of the fifth party. It wasn't so at the time when **Die Macher** was designed, but these days the CDU is looking nervously over its right-hand shoulder to where anti-immigration groups have coalesced

into the Republican Party, which in the recent European elections broke through the vital five per cent barrier.

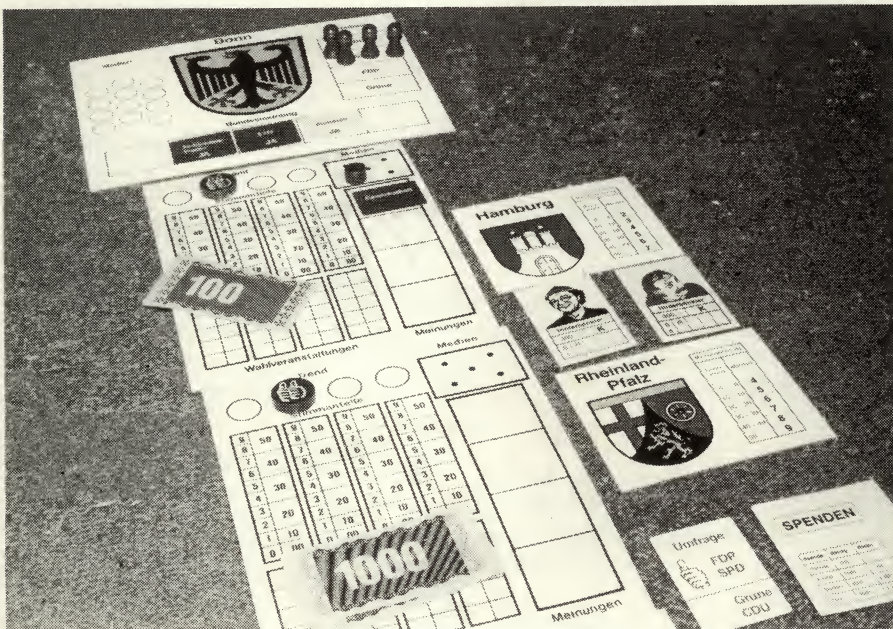
My set has some spare, blank, party programme cards, but if you have to make some of your own it is no great problem, for with this deck it does not matter that players can easily distinguish the additional cards from those supplied. So three 'immigration' programme cards are all you need. With the 'Meinung' cards it would matter if players could tell the new from the old, but you can get round the problem with a rule change: before play remove all the basic party platform cards from this deck and put *one* of each party's with the 'undecided opinion' cards; the second cards of the four standard parties are discarded. A side effect of this is that a party can always push its basic programme in one of the regions where it controls the press; it no longer has to wait for the card to appear. I don't think this is unreasonable, and we do something like it even in our four player games.

With the third deck, the opinion poll cards, you have no choice. You just have to make a new deck. The existing one has 24 cards, 24 being the number of ways you can put the four parties in order. The same list-everything approach for five parties would give you a deck with 120 cards – far more than you need for game purposes and far more than anyone would relish making. However, taking all possible orderings is only one way of getting what you want, which is just a deck that treats all players equally. You can devise fair decks with 20, with 30 and with 40 cards. If combinatorial mathematics makes you nervous and you can't see how to do this, write to me; though if you tackle the problem in an orderly fashion you should be able to solve it for yourself.

Each existing card reads +2, +1, -1, -2 for the four parties; the new ones are to read +2, +1, 0, -1, -2.

Making sideways extensions for the four regional election boards and providing somewhere for the fifth player to place his party bases is no problem, and that just leaves you having to find or make an extra set of wooden pieces. The small cubes in **Die Macher** are the same size as the ones in **Schoko & Co**. So if you have the latter game (and if not, why not?), that is one problem solved: the new party is either brown or pink! Pawns can be bought (small ones of the right size from David Watts at Rostherne Games). For media discs you can cut up circular dowelling. And while on the subject of media discs, I suggest that to allow for the extra player you have six media slots per region rather than five.

One final point about the extension to five players: the existing three versus one splits on policy issues become three versus two. I think that could well be an improvement in play terms: more than one person has noted that the existing split is a bit too sharp. **GI**



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## VARIANTS

# Sharks



*Shark is a fine abstract stock market game. Although sound judgement is required for success, luck can sometimes play an inordinately large rôle. The three variants presented here go some way towards reducing the chance element and ensuring that brainpower, rather than die power, wins the day.*

## LITTLE FISH BITE BACK

George Crawshay

Replace the six-sided die with an eight-sided die. Cover one of the blank faces on the coloured die with a black sticker, or a colour other than one on the die already. The effect of these new elements is as follows:

### Numeric die

- 7 Place a token anywhere on the board
- 8 Place a token in the area with the least number of tokens

### Coloured die

**Black** Place the colour that has the least number of tokens on the board

**Blank** Place any colour

The effect of these changes is to make for a game that is more balanced and exciting. The zones will become much more congested and there won't be the problem of the colour that is always lagging behind.

## LIVE NOW DIE LATER

Rich Goldbaum  
and  
Jeff Tolleson

This radical variant dispenses with the use of the die altogether. Instead you will need a set of cards numbered one to six, four cards representing the colours in the game, and two wild cards.

Deal one set each so that each player has a total of twelve cards. A player's turn now consists of playing a numeric card (to determine the zone), and a colour card. A wild card counts as any colour. After the twelve cards have been used simply pick up and use again.

This carries on until a winner has been determined in the usual manner. All other rules remain the same.

*(If the urge to roll some dice becomes too powerful, why not combine two of these variants? After say four rounds of card play, which should ensure a balanced start, revert to the variant using the eight-sided die – Ed)*

## COLOUR BLIND

Jean Vanaise

A simple variant by the game's designer: only use the numeric die. Players have a free choice as to which colours they place. GI

*Shark is published in Belgium by Flying Turtle Games, but is available with an English translation from Just Games and Esdevium, price £14.95.*

### NEXT ISSUE IN GI:

Reviews of 1853, Excalibur, Maxi Bourse plus many more of the Autumn releases.

A variant for HeroQuest.

Our new Scrabble column. Plus all the usual news, reviews, features and gossip.



**GREENPEACE**



**THE GREAT WHALES**

Since commercial whaling was banned in 1986, 11,000 whales have been slaughtered, most for so-called scientific research.

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Global temperatures are rising. The effects are unpredictable and likely to be catastrophic.

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**CAR EXHAUSTS**

A car in the UK pumps out an average of a ¼ tonne of toxic pollution every year.

In the US it is a fraction of this figure.

The technology exists to reduce the poison from our exhaust pipes, but few manufacturers are using it in the UK.

Greenpeace is campaigning to force car manufacturers in the UK to provide cars as clean as those they sell in other countries.

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**GREENPEACE**



**MARINE POLLUTION**

Pollution in our seas and estuaries is destroying habitats and killing marine life.

Urgent action is needed now to stop the discharge of industrial, chemical and radioactive wastes and the dumping of sewage sludge - the UK and Ireland are the only countries still dumping sewage sludge into the North and Irish seas.

Greenpeace has blocked chemical discharge pipes, confronted dumpships and researched and reported on the effects of toxic pollution.

In 1989, Greenpeace will continue to confront the polluters and to campaign for laws to be amended and enforced to protect our seas.

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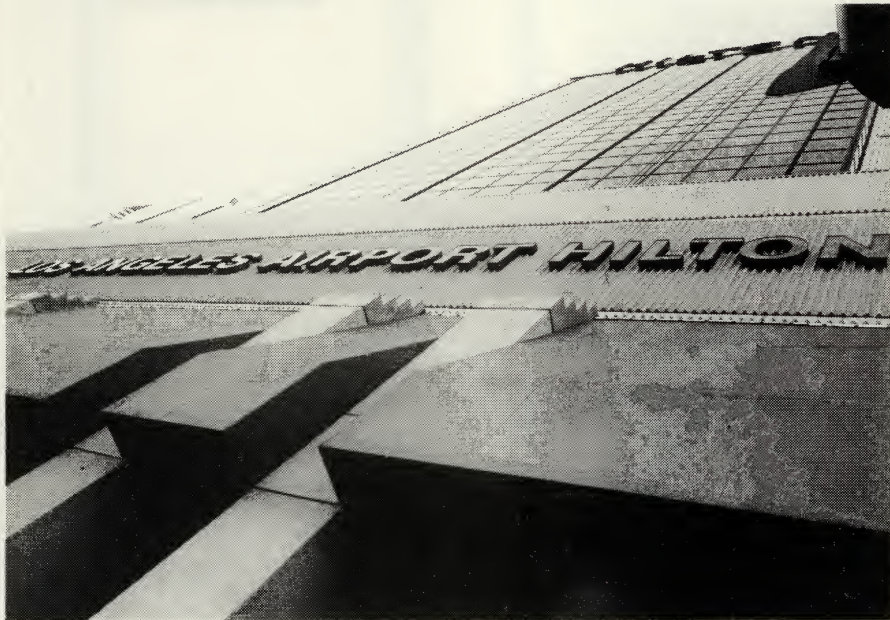
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## CONVENTION REPORT

# Origins '89

**Brian Walker**



The city of angels became the city of gamers, for one weekend at least, as 5000 of this strange tribe poured into the Airport Hotel, Los Angeles. The success of such conventions depends, to a certain degree, on manufacturers ensuring that there are enough new and exciting products to create the necessary *frisson*. Imagine going to a film festival and being confronted with last year's movies. Sadly, rather than new, it was a case of something borrowed, many things blue, as companies either failed to deliver, or if they did, simply presented rehashes. Perhaps the exception to this was organiser 3W who premiered four new games. **Hitler's Last Gamble** is yet another monster Battle of the Bulge game, originally published in Japan. **Tomorrow the World** is a rather novel design, featuring a points movement system, from self appointed king of the hobby, Ty Bomba.

**ASG Baseball** is a stats game and a known quantity – highly recommended. First word on the card game **Modern Naval Battles** was that it was 'heavily luck oriented, but fun'. Its resemblance to **Enemy in Sight** was also noted. Like most of the games receiving namechecks in this report, full reviews will appear in future editions of GI.

## SUPPLEMENTARY COST

Avalon Hill's **Siege of Jerusalem** failed to materialise, though the (enormous) map put in an appearance. **Main Battle Tank** (see review), and **Turning Point Stalingrad** did make it along with the repackaged **Acquire** (very nice artwork).

The lads from Iron Crown Enterprises sold out of most of their new **Shadow World** releases and also did well with the Flying Turtle Games (such as **Shark**) which they are now distributing in the US. It transpires that their own tastes are for boardgames such as **1829**, but the production costs, especially when compared to rolegame supplements, are prohibitive. Perhaps this explains why so many American (hobby) games feature such shoddy-looking components, especially when compared to their European counterparts. Task Force Games' **Lift Off**, for example, tackles a high tech and potentially interesting subject – the space race, but the paper components are decidedly low tech. This is another reason why MB's decision to discontinue their optimum quality Gamesmaster series is all the sadder. Stepping tentatively into the breach, though, are TSR. Games such as **Buck Rogers** and **Red Storm Rising**

have attracted rave reviews from us in the past. The new item on their stand was the stockmarket game licensed from Schmidt France, **Maxi Bourse**. Let's hope the game is as good as the production.

## SUITS SELL GAMES SHOCK!

West End Games seem to subscribe to the philosophy, shared by a number of dealers, that if you wear a suit, *ergo* you will sell more games. Curious. Especially when you consider that their potential customers seem to have so little respect for *haute couture*, or indeed fashion of any description. The only new game on the WE stand was **Desert Steel**. Suits or no, nothing seemed to be moving. Unsurprising: is there really a need for yet another game on that subject?

Mayfair Games' **Empire Builder** attracted considerable interest, especially in the tournaments, and more than their new **Batman** rolegame. Hardly surprising though, as this was primarily a boardgaming convention.

Tournaments are very popular at American conventions, probably reflecting the seriousness and intensity with which gamers there approach their hobby. Their enthusiasm for this format is one which I do not share, though each to his own. According to fellow limey Frank Dunn, the quality of play left something to be desired. The **Harpoon** tournament was over subscribed, he claimed, and largely consisted of people simply barking orders. In a similar vein, Rich Goldbaum, winner of the **1830** tournament, said that the strategy and tactics of some of his opponents were not up to the anticipated standard.

## SPEED THRILLS

One of the highlights of any Origins convention is the auction, and this one was no exception, largely thanks to Alphonso Smith and his team, who organised a difficult job with an efficiency hitherto unseen at such events. Alphonso also had a nice way with one liners: 'The emphasis at this auction will be on speed. I hope you've brought some.' Nor were the punters to be outdone: 'Here we have a mint



condition **Scrabble** with wooden pieces'. 'Is it punched?' (voice from the crowd). Prices here could best be described as sensible, a description which certainly did not apply to the asking rates of the dealers. Does anybody really think that **Conquest of the Empire** and **Broad-sides and Boarding Parties** (both MB Gamesmaster) are really worth \$100 each? Apparently nobody did for they remained unsold. Chief bad guy in this scenario was the Weekend Warrior (wearing a suit), from southern California.

If you were not interested in buying games, old or new, or playing in tournaments, then what were you doing here? Well, there were always the seminars and self-congratulatory awards to lull you to sleep. In both cases, too many, and too inconsequential. **Kremlin**, for example, got an award for being the 'best pre-1947 board game' (itself a ludicrous accolade). Yet the version to which they refer is situated in the Gorby era, widely rumoured to be sometime after 1947.

For me, one of the highlights of the convention was the *America's Pup* tournament organised for the trade by Iron Crown Enterprises (for more details and photos see **Sniper**, page 22). Otherwise *Origins '89* was, I'm afraid, a rather dreary affair. **GI**

Photos by Brian Walker

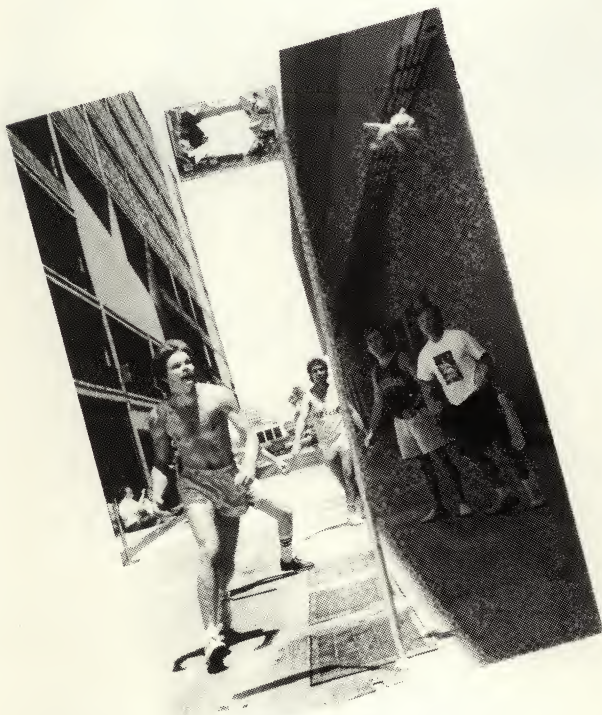
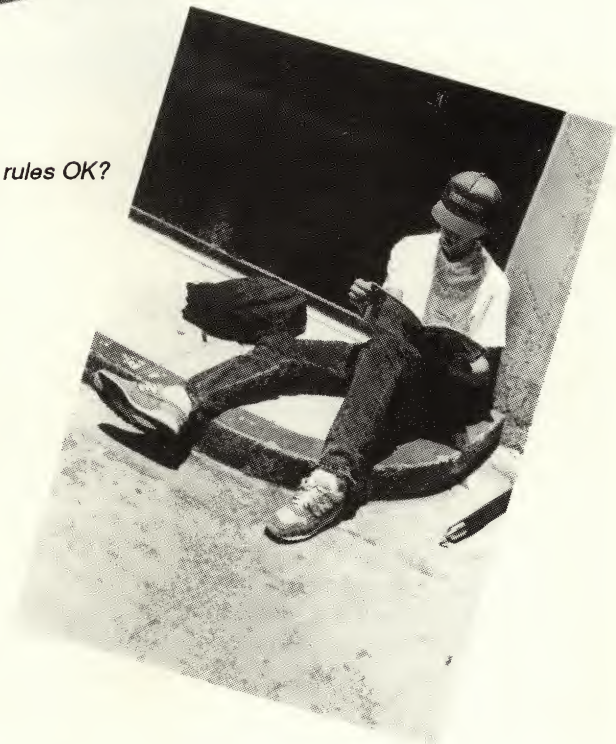
*War of the World: The scholarly approach.*



*'I think Der Führer's there ...'*



*Rules rules OK?*



*The Americas Pup. See Sniper, page 22.*



## CONVENTION REPORT


# Manorcon '89

**Brian Walker**

Birmingham. Brum. Bull-Ring. What hath this noble city done to have such architectural havoc wreaked upon it? Britain's first post-holocaust city played host to the University Diplomacy Championship at the annual Manorcon convention held on the Birmingham University campus. As usual, many of the convention goers showed no interest whatsoever in the game that rewards the worst in people. There were even some role-players there!

The tournament itself was won by a bunch of devious scallies from Liverpool. The individual trophy went to one Paul Oakes, yet another scouser (referee, please). The important stuff was going on elsewhere, though most of the diplomats showed no interest whatsoever in anything undiplomatic. They simply turned up, lied to and double crossed anyone who would listen, and then disappeared. Good riddance.

Star of the show was Francis Tresham's 1853, *almost* the production version. In a departure for Hartland Trefoil, the new game will appear in a bookcase format, though retailing for a price of £39.50, you'd expect an entire library to be included as well. Early reports confirm the promise of the game though despite the claims made on the box, the stock market plays as much a part as the building.

A surprise hit was **Topple** (see review), which provided hours of mindless entertainment for the sort of people (in other words the majority of convention goers) that love mindless entertainment. In a similar vein, the wonderful **Liars Dice** (MB USA) thrilled the hordes and was in constant use. Probably the most played game, apart from **Diplomacy**, was **1830** (Avalon Hill) which must prove something (answers on a postcard, please). As to the cuisine; miraculously, nobody fell ill over the weekend, despite the efforts of the chef. Little wonder our education is in such a state if our students have to . . . (unfortunately this report had to be curtailed rather abruptly, due to the writer choking on a piece of chicken supreme - in a basket) 



*Topple: Danger! Men at play*

## Die Macher

(The Fixers)

'Flawless'—Alan R Moon

'One of the best games ever made'—Brian Walker

'A masterpiece'—Derek Carver

Playing time: 4 hours

**Die Macher** is published in Germany by Moskito Games, but is available with rules in English, price £25 + £3 P&P, from *Games International*, Lamerton House, 23a High Street, Ealing, London W5 5DF.

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## Stuart Dagger

Two of the best games from the mid seventies were produced by one man outfits who were then never heard from again. James St Laurent gave us *Crude* (republished last year as *McMulti*) and James Koplow *Organized Crime*. This month's tribute is to the second of them, a game which has everything that a multi-player game should have – lots of player interaction, lots of decisions to take and lots of scope for clever play. It can also be very funny.

I was introduced to it by Rob Chapman, a long time *Diplomacy* crony, now to be found organising BabbaCon. 'A great game,' he said, 'and it has proper wooden pieces.' It also has a well-written rule book with a copy for each player, a nicely designed board and money drily labelled 'donated by the American public'. So, a well presented package which put many an offering from the large companies in the shade. The game is for four players, each of whom represents a gang boss, and the object, as in the equally entertaining *Family Business*, is to rub out the opposition.

The board has a headquarters for each player, where you place your gang boss and a bunch of protective hitmen, and around these is a double circular track. Movement is by dice roll, but a clever

mechanism gives you a degree of control over where you end up. The spaces on the track are of six types – *corrupt official*, *cities*, *business investment*, *illegal activities*, *power* and *mistake*. Landing on a corrupt official space gives you the right to purchase a judge, senator or governor. Owning one of these can result in your hitmen avoiding the consequences of a mistake caused by an unlucky die roll, but their main function is to provide votes on the 'National Crime Commission', and it is this last that is at the heart of the game. It decides whether or not your application to extend your money making activities is accepted, and whether the hitman you have just rubbed out was a murderous hoodlum deserving of his fate or a complete innocent on the way to visit his mother. Your votes on the Crime Commission are determined by how rich you are and how many corrupt officials you control, and you need to walk a fine line – too few votes and people ignore you, too many and they can't afford to let you live. How good you are at persuading people to vote for you, what you offer them and whether you keep any promises made is up to you.

Cities, business investment and illegal activities are the way you get an income, and landing on one of the appropriate spaces gives you the option of applying to the Crime Commission. Your first city goes through on the nod, but everything else has to be voted on. However, al-

though income is important, it is necessary not to get carried away in your pursuit of it. Each city, corrupt official, business investment and illegal activity you have uses up one of your markers, the same markers that you use as hitmen. So as you increase your income and power base you decrease your capacity for defence. Markers are not recycled: each hitman killed is a marker lost, and each marker used to indicate something is a hitman you never get. It is a balance you have to get right, for in the final shootout hitmen defending your home base are important.

A lot of references so far to the elimination of hitmen, but no indication of how it is done. The basic method is to use one of your movement points as you go past your victim, but later in the game it is the 'power' cards that do most of the work. You pick these up whenever you land on one of the appropriate spaces on the track: a few of them are worth money; the rest are either one or two 'hits', to be used in place of movement points when attacking the opposition. An opponent with a pile of power cards and a man within striking distance of your home base probably has a list with your name on it.

The climax to the game comes when players become strong enough to go for 'home base hits'. For these a nominated hitman has to reach the intended victim's HQ, eliminate the defenders and then shoot the boss. Once your boss is dead you are out of the game. Last one left standing wins. Games which work on a successive elimination basis often suffer because the victims then have to sit around waiting for the game to finish. It doesn't work that way with *Organized Crime*: once the first boss goes the game doesn't usually have long to run, and the victim tends to be sufficiently interested in the denouement not to be bored.

One final point, please note that I have got all the way through this without once trying to sound like Edward G Robinson. Pretty restrained, eh? Himself could never have done it. Could ya boss? (*Shut yer mouth, yer little creep. There's only one Rico, d'yer hear?* – Ed) [E]

A few copies of this excellent game have been unearthed by Just Games, who should have them in stock by the time this article appears.



**VARIANTS**

# Organized Crime

Lee Partis suggests some rule variants for this game of gangsters.

Firstly – no attacks on home bases until the fourth move. This is an obvious rule and allows the game to develop.

Secondly – make another condition of victory that you can also win by amassing \$2 000 000. I am sure Mr Koplow would send some of his boys round (if he knew my rule detracts from the 'realism' of the game), yet it adds another dimension and increases the game 'development'. It is very hard to win this way, but it can be done.

Thirdly, and most importantly, power cards. This rule allows player to use hit cards offensively and *defensively*. Let me

give an example. Using modified example one in the rule book, green hit man on Chicago announces attack on yellow home base (yellow boss in home base). Green owns six one hit cards – yellow four one hit cards.

Green throws 7.

- 1 to Mistake
- 2 to Corrupt Official
- 3 to yellow home base hit men
- 4 to rub out (1)
- 5 to rub out (2)
- 6 to rub out (3)

Green then turns over one hit card and yellow neutralises it with one of his. This continues until both have laid four each (that is until yellow has exhausted his stock or chooses to stop), then green lays his remaining two and rubs out yellow hit men (4) and (5). Green now realises he will not succeed so he uses his last die pip:

7 to rub out (6)

... and fails in his attack.

I hope that explains it clearly enough. This rule gives more *latent* power, and power cards have more *real* power. It does become harder to attack home bases successfully, but I think that is a good thing. Of course, if the defender has more hit cards than the attacker, the attacker loses his hit man. Also, players do not *have* to use their hit cards when attacked.

This rule tends to lead to a 'struggle for power' which, in my view, improves the game. [G]

*This variant originally appeared in Games & Puzzles and is reprinted with permission.*

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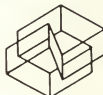
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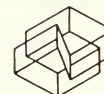
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## DESERT ISLAND GAMES

# Faraway fantasy

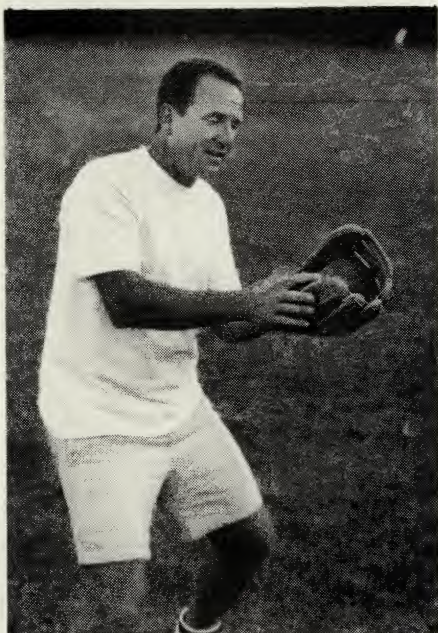
*Having recently sailed back from Spain, Ian Livingstone had plenty of time to think about which games he would throw into his life raft.*

## Day One

The life raft gets shredded on the coral reef surrounding my dream island home. Washed up on the golden beach, I drag myself over to my precious cartons. The first I open contains all my role-playing books. Alas, they are a soggy mess so that's that selection problem out of the way. At least a copy of *Growing Coconuts For Fun And Profit* has survived.

The next carton I open is bone dry and contains my games, all in good order. Phew! The next few hours are spent building a games table and chairs on the off-chance that somebody might stroll along looking for some dice to rattle (in my coconut shell dice shakers).

To suit my own moods and various tastes of my opponents-to-be, I made sure that



*Ian Livingstone demonstrates his lack of Baseball Strategy.*

I was well covered: my favourite and a reserve in ten categories.

No sooner are my games unpacked when the pitching staff of the Boston Red Sox come jogging along the beach doing a bit of off-season training. After failing to win any coconuts on my new shy, they are nevertheless keen to play a *sports game*. The two on my shelf are **Baseball Strategy** (Avalon Hill) and **Win, Place & Show** (Avalon Hill). The latter I have in the 3M edition, one of the set of eight sports games which you could buy in the sales of New York at \$4 each not too many years ago. **Win, Place & Show** is lots of fun and I enjoy the fact that it is not just a race game. But without question my favourite sports game is **Baseball Strategy**. It's the best if-he-thinks-that-I-think-that-he-thinks game I've ever played and a near perfect simulation of the duel between pitcher and batter in baseball. But if you don't like or understand baseball, it could be pretty dull.

## Day Two

A group of exceedingly fat people waddle up to my stall to buy coconuts so that they can have a coconut eating competition. The winner somehow eats 27 of the things. I reason that if they can stomach that, then they can get through a *heavy game*. The two I have in stock are **Die Macher** (Hans im Gluck) and **Civilization** (Gibsons/Avalon Hill). **Civilization** is a long game which to my mind gets bogged down in the middle. It's one of those games that I want to like more but can't. Therefore the eaters get **Die Macher** to play which is surely the best election game ever invented. There is so much to think about and it is all totally absorbing. But if you start playing after a large evening meal (curried coconut, perhaps), I suggest you play with a bottle of indigestion tablets nearby to avoid weary errors at around 2am.

## Day Three

Lo and behold, a raft is washed up onto the beach during the night. It's Swiss Family Robinson, and the kids are soon on at Dad to buy them coconut ice cream from my stall. After that, they are keen to



play a *family game*, and I've got either **TV Wars** (Avalon Hill) or **Broadway** (TSR) for them. **Broadway** is great fun, and although there is a lot of luck due to all the dice rolling, it seems to balance out. The end game dice rolling is a bit severe, though, and a few bad rolls could lose you the game undeservedly after all the previous good play. Therefore the Robinsons get to play **TV Wars**. Again lots of luck, but also lots of thinking is required to manage your network successfully in the ratings war. Some of the unfair luck elements can be eliminated if you incorporate Derek Carver's rules amendments (see GI #4).

## Day Four

A private plane lands on the beach to allow some professional gamblers on their way to Las Vegas to stretch their legs and have a paddle. They buy tickets in my **Win A Coconut A Week For Life** raffle and then agree to a *bluffing game*. Out comes **Showbiz** (Prestige/Hexagames) and **Monte Carlo** (ASS). More of a betting than bluffing game, the gamblers would relish the way **Monte Carlo** unfolds while the bets are placed. But any poker player worth his salt would always benefit from a game of **Showbiz**. Sadly abstract in its presentation, this game of signing up artistes of different popularity is made brilliant by the successful use of time and energy counters in getting the artist you want. Rumour has it that Avalon Hill will make their version of the game more thematic in presentation.

## Day Five

What a group of philosophy students are doing waking me up at 6am I don't know, but they seem eager to pay to hear me lecture them about the relationship between



man and coconuts and the universe. After that, they are more than ready for a *paranoia game*, and I give them the choice of either **Kremlin** (Avalon Hill) or **Hol's Der Geier** (Ravensburger). I never know if I'm playing either of these games correctly, but it's lots of fun finding out. In **Hol's Der Geier** everybody always seems to use the same cards trying to win the same mice cards whether high or low. Sometimes it's best to disregard logic or, if the brain ache is too much, pull a card out at random! Personally, I prefer board-games to card games and so the philosophers are given **Kremlin**. Purging and denouncing the Soviet politburo is a great theme which is served brilliantly by an original and fascinating game system. Even Gorby might smile at this classic, sending the old hardliners to Siberia.

### Day Six

It is late afternoon when a troop of Marines runs ashore from their landing craft, rehearsing an invasion. Five of them stop at my milk shake stall and I keep them in the fighting spirit by offering them a *wargame*. Twenty years ago I used to enjoy slogging it out with fiddly counters across hex grids wondering what the Combat Result Tables had to offer. But today, it's either of the golden oldies **Apocalypse** (Games Workshop) or **Summit** (Milton Bradley) as the nearest I can get to enjoying a wargame. **Apocalypse** was originally known as **Warlord** and was published by its inventor Mike Hayes until Games Workshop acquired the rights in 1980. It is a great empire-building game set in a trigger-happy nuclear age and has a simple but brilliant

out-think your opponent combat mechanism. But I decide on **Summit** as my choice, as economics influence the power struggles in this classic of the 1960s. Don't forget, though, to leave out the Current Event Card which causes the player to lose two I-beams and one of each power chip: it's too powerful.

### Day Seven

What luck! A photographer and crew arrive to take shots of some rather interestingly attired girls for the next Pirelli Calendar. The girls are so impressed with the tanning power of my coconut milk lotion, they even agree to play a game. They are non-gamers so I bring out two *introductory games*, **Forum Romanum** (Kosmos) and **Heimlich & Co** (Ravensburger). Both were invented by Wolfgang Kramer, one of the best designers around. They are both in his usual style: an abstract game with a loose theme and simple to learn but skilful in play. **Forum Romanum** just wins for me as you are slightly more in control of your own destiny.

### Day Eight

The photographers have hardly packed up and left when along the beach, wine glasses in hand, comes a group of art dealers. Two piles of old coconut shells spattered with parrot droppings draw their attention and a hastily written sign entitled 'Parting of the Red Sea' rewards me with ridiculous amounts of money from the first bidder. An *abstract game* is called for, and I present the dealers with **Can't Stop** (Parker Bros) and **Coup**

(ASS). **Coup** is another from Wolfgang Kramer requiring fine deduction skills and help from other players in order to win. But I prefer **Can't Stop**, a great probability dice game invented by prolific designer Sid Sackson. Apart from having dozens of his games published, Sid also has the biggest and most comprehensive games collection in the world. It covers his entire house which happens to be in the South Bronx. Over the years he has been robbed five times, but each time the thieves were courteous (or bewildered) enough to leave Sid's games alone.

### Day Nine

Coincidentally, the cast from **Neighbours** are filming a holiday scene on location on my island. Kylie needs a coconut matting skirt and I'm quick to supply one. The film crew show interest in playing a *licensed game* and I have **Dallas** (Yaquinto) and **Dune** (Avalon Hill). **Dune** was a commission for Eon Products and has all the hallmarks of the design team who produced **Cosmic Encounter**, **Darkover** and **Borderlands** under their own label. And although it does justice to the book, it really isn't half as much fun as **Dallas**, a laugh-a-minute game lost on the viewing audiences of the day and missed by the gaming *aficionados* of the day. The stockholders' meetings send groups of players all over the house, double-dealing their way to become president. I like it.

### Day Ten

Morning business is brisk as I sell a shareholding in my painted coconut shell oven-to-tableware export company to a group of holidaying Japanese businessmen. They insist on playing a *business game* for which I have two beauties at the ready. **Acquire** (Avalon Hill) and **McMulti** (Hexagames) are both favourites of mine. Formerly known as **Crude** before it disappeared into oblivion, **McMulti** popped up with lots of lovely plastic pieces. I can't understand, though, why a game based on the drilling, refining and selling of oil is now called **McMulti**. There are lots of potential strategies and some luck is needed, but it really is a must for any games collection. However I just prefer Sid Sackson's 1960s classic **Acquire**, a simple to learn, yet fascinating and exciting game of hotel acquisition. The restrictions put on purchasing makes each turn agony, and only being allowed to purchase *after* a chain has been expanded is frustrating beyond a joke. An essential game, however, it must be said. The Japs were so impressed they got me a lift home! G

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# SNIPER



## Adeptus Catatonicus

One of the undoubted highlights of the recent Origins convention was the America's Pup. Organised by Iron Crown Enterprises, this extra-curricular event took place in an alleyway between the gaming rooms and the dealer area. The object was to throw a stuffed cat through a hole punched in a gamebox which had been rigged up on the top of a post. The rules were (very) loosely based on basketball, though eggs played a rather unusual and prominent part. In your left hand you had to hold an egg. If the egg should break, your team loses a point. Put the cat through the hole, and you score two points. Hit the box with the cat, chalk up a point. I was part of the 'commonwealth team' which consisted of Drew Fyfe, of Australian distributors Jedco, and John Morgan, marketing manager of Iron Crown Enterprises. Being Aussies, they quickly adapted the game to Australian rules. Ambulances were soon on the scene and lawsuits are currently pending.

One of the highlights of the competition, though, was watching Task Force Games supremo John Olsen haul his not inconsiderable bulk around the court like a ballet dancer. Opponents just bounced off him. Even he, though, was no match for the eventual winners, the West Coast All-Stars, who looked as though they had just been recruited from nearby Muscle Beach.

Runners-up were Grenadier miniatures. And the Commonwealth team? We lost by two broken eggs. But what was the

gamebox selected for the honour of having a cotton cat slung through it? In a rare show of discretion for this column, it shall remain nameless. However, we can't resist printing the accompanying photo. But why was this particular product chosen? Come in the organisers: 'We wanted to choose a game everybody hated'.

## X-Rated

When Channel Four's *Club X* first hit the screens, the critics were unanimous. They howled as one. No doubt much of the bitching was down to the fact that they themselves had not been chosen to present the pretentious dross. The reason this column is taking an interest in the proceedings is that one of their June shows

was devoted exclusively to games. All kinds of games. The first interview quickly encompassed all the depth we have come to expect from shows devoted to 'yout culture': 'Well, what have we got here, John?' 'This is a new computer game called *Warlords*. You play the part of a general controlling armies, and things.' 'Could you explain how it works?' 'Er, no, it's too complicated.' The next segment, featuring a mad scotsman (no, not our Ellis Simpson), was actually interesting. This fellow really knew something about games, and before anybody could stop him, he whipped out a copy

of Avalon Hill's *Samurai* for its first known appearance before the cameras, and proceeded to give a brief description of play. The next game to claim its 15 seconds of fame was Sleuth Publications' *Gumshoe*, over which the aforementioned jock frothed ecstatically. If this carries on they'll be making TV shows from games, rather than *vice versa*. Which brings us neatly to our next item.

## Batty

Batfilm Productions, the team responsible for you-know-what, have announced they are to make a film of *Monopoly*, a well known boardgame. Appropriately the movie will be shot in Atlantic City, which, of course, featured on the original version. Quite who is to star in this strange project I have no idea. However, I would like to nominate Leslie Grantham ('Dirty Den') for the role of the Old Kent Road (like the game itself, there will surely be a British version), and who else could play Liverpool St station but Cyril Smith? Central Casting, eat your heart out. G



Task Force v Grenadier: catch that cat!





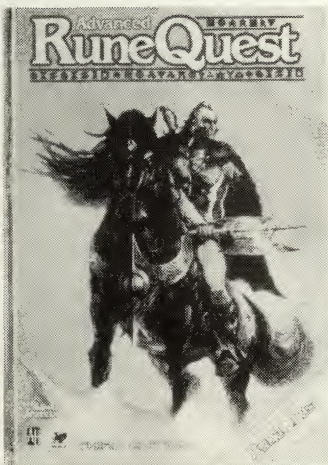
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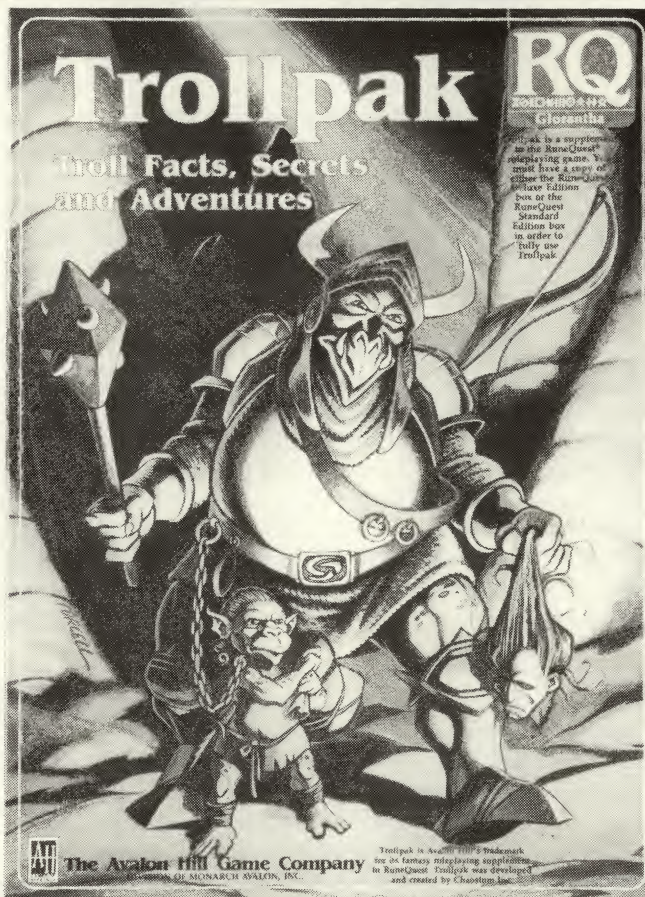
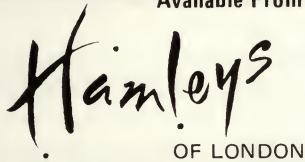


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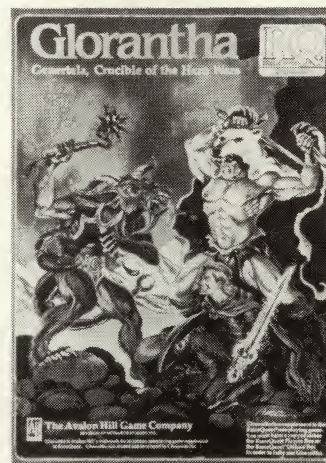
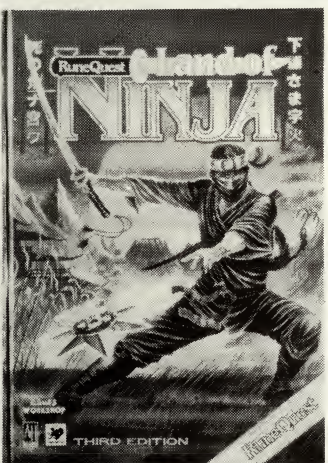
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## GRiM shock

*Games Review Monthly* and its sister paper, *Games Trade Monthly*, have both been sold to former TSR(UK) employee Rik Rose. According to the press release it is hoped that the sale will result in 'much needed improvements in layout, design, and presentation'. Richard Milner will continue on as editor so it is unlikely that the content will change much.

## Your trains tonight

The long awaited **1853** from Hartland Trefoil is now available. The game is based on the successful **1829** and **1830** design format using a map of India. RRP is £39.50. A full review will appear in our next issue.

Still with Hartland Trefoil, expansion kit **MSK 5**, for use with **1829**, comprises of alternative 'double small town tiles' of the type that are used in both **1830** and **1853**. The kit also includes 'single line' large stations and the 'long lost' tile number 11 (?). Expansion kit **MSK 6**, also for use with **1829**, contains **1830** style 'double large town tiles' in both green and russet which increase the scope of several areas of the board.

An **1829** tournament will be held at Longworth Hall, Hereford, over the weekend October 20 to 22. For more information contact Longworth Hall, Lugwardine, Hereford, HR1 4DF.

For those of you interested in theories of game design Hartland Trefoil will be holding a three day seminar at Missenden Abbey, September 15 to 17. The course fee is £90 (single room), or £80 (shared room) per person. For further details contact: Missenden Abbey, Great Missenden, Bucks HP 16 OBD.

## A house returns

GDW announce the publication of the second edition of their award winning American Civil War game **A House Divided**. Featuring new packaging and revised rules **A House Divided** is scheduled for a September release.

## Bigger bucks

Those of you who bought **Buck Rogers** on the strength of our review in issue 2, buy yourself a drink. TSR have just announced a price increase pushing the game up from £19.95, into the £24.95 galaxy. **Dragonlance** undergoes a similar increase. TSR have a whole bunch of new releases this month: **Cities of Mystery**

# NEWS

contains 3-D cardboard buildings and street plans for use with all AD&D game systems, price £9.95. **King's Festival** is a new D&D adventure written by Carl Sargent, price £3.95. From the world of **Dragonlance** comes **Dragon Magic** by Rick Swan. Compatible with all AD&D game systems, this module costs £5.95. **The Weird, Weird West** is a new **Marvel Super Heroes** adventure by Ray Winninger, price £4.95.

## The twilight zone

GDW have a new addition to their **Twilight 2000** rolegame system. **Bear's Den** is a new module which continues the four-part series dedicated to a **Return to Europe**. The anticipated UK price is £6, US price \$7. Due in November is the **Nato Vehicle Guide**, another module in the **Return to Europe** series.

## Upfront (2)

A new expansion kit for use with either **Upfront** or **Banzai** is now available. **Desert War** introduces the Italians into the game. Included in the package are new counters including surrender tokens. The French also make an appearance and have a six-card hand capacity with a maximum discard capability of one card per turn. To give you an idea of their effect on the game we quote from the rulebook: 'one of the most intriguing possibilities of this variant is the chance to match a German and Italian squad in a team game against British or American opposition.' Price £8.20 from TM Games.



## Expanded Civ

Another Avalon Hill game receiving an expansion kit is **Civilization**. By adding Africa and Iberia, the **Western Expansion Map** is aimed at improving the balance in the four player game, and providing an interesting variation in five, six, and seven player games. Price £6.95 from TM Games.

## Midcon '89

This annual convention takes place in the palatial surroundings of the Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. November 3 to 5. The main event is the **National Diplomacy Championship**, which this year has been the source of some controversy due to the organisers' decision to offer prize money. As usual with these events, many people just take their own games along and ignore the diplomatic goings-on. Rooms in the hotel cost £27 for a single, and £22.50 per person for a double. Breakfast is included. Highly recommended for anybody with an interest in general games. For further details and booking forms contact: Brian Williams, 30 Rydding Lane, Millfields Estate, West Bromwich, B71 2HA.

## Essen guide

Anybody wishing to visit the Essen Games Fair, the world's largest gaming event, should waste no time in contacting David Watts, who has produced a guide which might be suitably subtitled 'Everything you wanted to know about Essen that you didn't realise you wanted to know'. Included in the pamphlet is everything from how to get there to hotels and parking. To obtain this mound of information send an SAE to: David Watts, 102 Priors Rd, Milford Haven, Dyfed, SA73 2ED.

## Workshop wonders

The latest releases from Nottingham include **Talisman City**, another expansion to GW's most popular game. **Warhammer 40K** fans who missed the **White Dwarf** articles on the game can now get them all in one 200 page tome: the **Warhammer 40K Companion** costs £9.99. For **Warhammer Fantasy Role Play** there's another collection of **White Dwarf** material - scenarios - with new rules and adventures. For the younger player, Workshop have released a quartet of 'Troll Games': **Hungry Troll and the Gobbos**, **Oi! Dat's my Leg**, **Trolls in the Pantry!** and **Squelch!** have a pervading impression of naughtiness and sell for £5.99 each. GI



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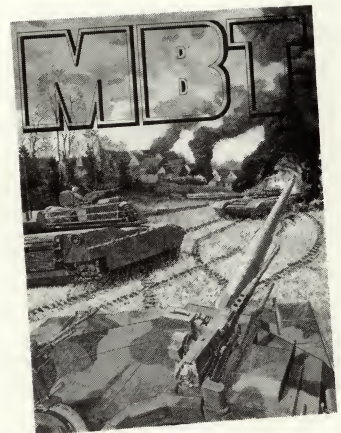
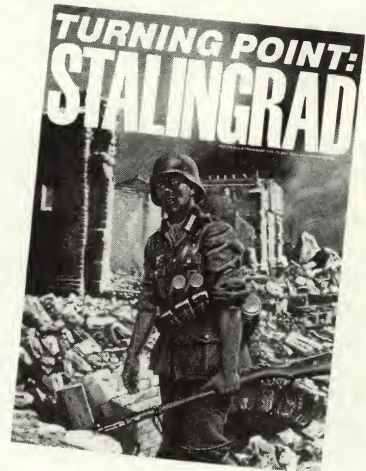
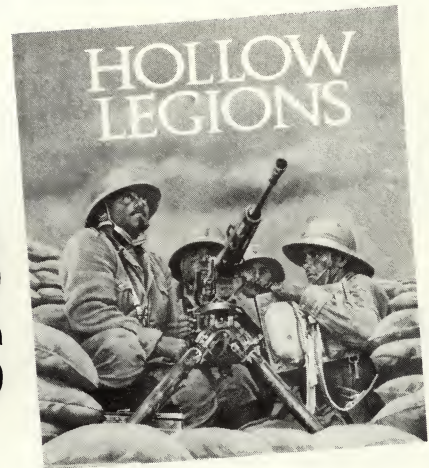
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## REVIEWS

# WARGAMES

## GAME OF THE MONTH

### MAIN BATTLE TANK

DESIGNED BY  
JAMES DAY

PUBLISHED BY  
AVALON HILL

PRICE £24.55



MBT is a tactical game of modern conventional ground combat in Western Europe, and comes in an attractive, if rather weighty, bookcase style box. Among the numerous contents you will find four nicely produced geomorphic map boards of the *Squad Leader* type, but at a scale of 100 metres to the hex the terrain density is obviously different.

Other goodies you will find include 170 large counters, and 260 small counters representing the armies of the Soviet Union, America, and West Germany, plus appropriate game markers. Only one side of the vehicle markers are used in the game, thus each vehicle is back printed

with a different unit thus extending the versatility of the counter mix. One minor gripe, though: the die cutting could have been better – a modelling knife was needed to separate the counters cleanly.

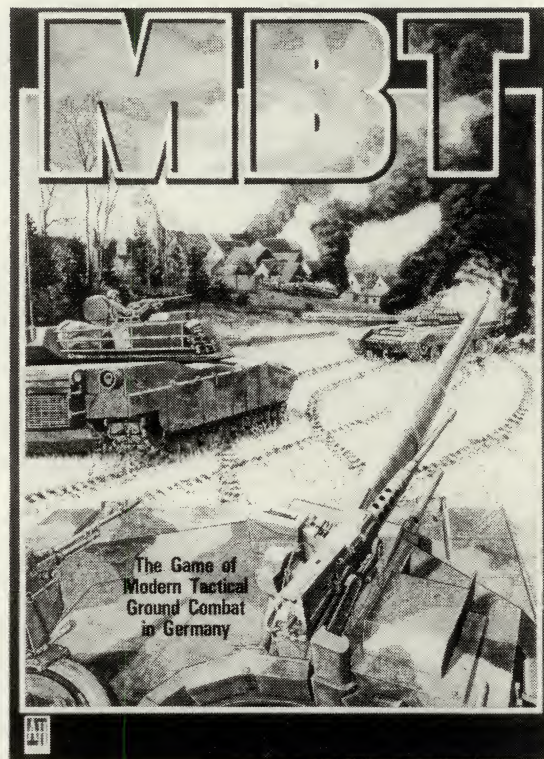
Other than the silhouettes, the only information on the unit counters is an ID number, or in the case of vehicles or helicopters, their name. This is because all the information required is held on data cards. There are a total of 28 such cards and each displays an abundance of detail about specific unit types, including movement allowance and costs, all weapons and their firepower at various ranges, plus armour values for the different faces of the vehicle. The Yaquinto games *Panzer* and *Armour* both used a similar information system.

As well as double-sided player aid cards, there are a quite a lot of charts in this game, but all are well laid out and make for easy inspection. The information card houses the turn track and terrain key. Also on display are four large blank hexes called 'substitute hexes', which players can use if certain hexes on the mapboard itself become too congested: a nice idea that could be used in games more often. The rear of this card holds all the game abbreviations and is also a key to the data cards.

#### MORE DICE NEEDED

MBT uses percentages for most of its calculations which are based on the results of the two ten-sided quality dice that are provided. However, because the fire phase is simultaneous, it becomes inconvenient to constantly pass the dice back and forth. It would have been more helpful if four dice had been provided. So, if you play this game, be sure to have a couple of extra dice at the ready.

Last but not least is the rule book. Weighing in at 52 pages it appears quite



daunting at first, though it serves well as a testimony of the time and effort that has gone into the design and development of this game.

#### 7-PAGE BASICS

Actually the rule book is quite user-friendly, and specific sections can be quickly located. As with many of the Avalon Hill games there is a basic section which introduces players to the system and also sets the foundations for future rules to build upon. In MBT the basic game can be played after digesting the first seven pages, though it is not enough simply to skim over these rules as they provide the basis of the game and must be fully understood if you are to progress.

Despite the weighty tome, the game itself is not particularly difficult. Obviously there is a lot of text to get through, but players who have had previous experience of modern tactical games should quickly pick up the procedures.

I must say that I disagree with the back of the box blurb which describes the game as being of 'medium complexity'. Owing



to the sheer volume of rules, rather than any inherent complexity, I would put it a little higher.

### ADVANCED MOUTHFUL

The advanced section of the rule book is 11 pages long and introduces infantry and general purpose fire, while building upon the principles set out in the basic rules. This is a hefty chunk to swallow in one go, but players can enjoy a reasonable game at this level, and find that it can be completed in reasonable time.

The players can delve at their leisure into the 15 pages of optional rules. Although termed 'optional', they include artillery, and air units which are essential to the modern theatre of battle. The last section of rules contains scenarios and organisation lists. In addition to the four scenarios provided there is a 'design your own' chapter that is well supported by nine pages crammed full of organisation lists which should arouse the interest of the miniatures player.

The sequence of play has both simultaneous and non-simultaneous phases. At the start of each turn players roll for initiative. The player with the highest then decides who should go first in the non-simultaneous phase. Both players then secretly give orders to each of their units. This is done by placing counters (containing orders) on the appropriate unit. Orders are not revealed until executed. The fire phase (simultaneous) occurs first; direct fire, anti-tank missile fire, and finally, overwatch fire.

Movement is not simultaneous, but is usually interactive owing to the enemy interrupting movement with overwatch fire. Finally, there is the administration phase which also includes the only opportunity in the game to change the turret facings – something that can take quite a bit of getting used to.

Overall the turns run smoothly and the use of orders is handled in a nice way. In many cases, the orders given to enemy units will be fairly obvious by their circumstances. However, players will frequently get some surprises.

### WATCHING YOU WATCHING ME

The 'overwatch' order is an especially nice touch: this not only allows a unit to fire on enemy units as they move, but also allows them to fire at enemy units that fire in their line of sight, and that includes their overwatch fire. Numerous modern period games fail to include this important and realistic rule.

The rules are dotted with fairly short but excellent game mechanics that give the game a unique flavour. The 'doctrine' rule is a good example of this. In play, only the Soviet units are allowed to use this rule. The rationale is based upon a Soviet document: 'One of the serious problems in planning against American doctrine is that Americans do not read their manuals, nor do they feel any obligation to follow their doctrine'. The willingness of the West to allow their junior officers more responsibility is reflected in the game by not placing doctrine restrictions upon the American or West German forces, thus allowing them greater flexibility. In effect this is a doctrine in itself and may raise some eyebrows. However, I like it.

### TIME TO FIRE

Firing weapons will be a time consuming activity for the first few games, but players will quickly get used to the various procedures. Fire is detailed and again should prove popular with miniatures players. Firstly, the players select the weapon that will fire, and the type of ammunition that will be used after checking for range and modifiers. A 'to hit' number is located and the players then roll the dice to get equal or less than the requisite number to score a hit.

If the shot hits, the defender must assess the point of impact, that is, which armoured face was hit and the strength of armour at that point. The penetration factors are then compared to the armour value and if the shot penetrates, the firer makes a further die roll to calculate the extent of the damage. It sounds protracted, but it works well and all the essential information is found on the unit data cards which are just oozing with information. General purpose fire is calculated differently, but likewise goes through a multi step procedure.

Modern weapons are lethal and it is true to say that if it can be seen, then it can be hit and very likely destroyed. Some modern games take this to extremes, making it almost suicidal to fall into the line of an enemy gun. MBT is thankfully a little more forgiving and realistic. Shots can miss, or hit and fail to penetrate, or just take out a gun leaving the rest of the vehicle intact, all of which makes for an interesting and tense game. MBT is a substantial game and it will take some effort to make use of the full system. However, like *Squad Leader*, it will probably frequently come off the shelves to be played. The investment in time needed to learn the system will therefore be repaid, but it is fair to say that there is

too much here for anyone wishing only to have a casual affair with modern tactical simulations.

The company commanders at Avalon Hill consider the game to have a low solitaire value. Undoubtedly some of the mechanics such as 'orders' are not conducive to solitaire play, but these are not the real problem. The real hitch is that handling two large forces can be overwhelming. It can even be a bit much for two players in the larger scenarios – so much so that the rule book encourages multi-player games.

### SERIOUS BATTLE

For my money, I feel that the game is a little too serious and overtaxing on the procedures side. I prefer games that use simpler mechanics to get the feel of battle across rather than the employment of hard data. However, this is purely a personal view and MBT should be well received by those whose prime interest is with modern tactical games. Miniature players should also take a look at this game.

*Norman Smith*

## Star Ratings

\*\*\*\*\*

First class game. Hall of Fame material

\*\*\*\*

A good game, even if the subject doesn't appeal to you

\*\*\*

Competent but nothing special

\*\*

Not recommended unless you're especially interested in the subject



A true turkey



# FIGHT FOR THE SKY

DESIGNER UNKNOWN

PUBLISHED BY  
ATTACTIX

PRICE £9.99



It's rare to see British-produced board wargames these days, especially any with the production qualities of American games. Well, Attactix certainly have the production side licked in this re-release of their 1982 design, but it's sad that the game itself couldn't live up to the same high standard.

## ADLER TAG

**Fight for the Sky** is a Battle of Britain game that covers the vital first week following *Adler Tag* when the Luftwaffe pounded Britain's air defences in order to gain air superiority. The production values inside the colourful box are certainly up to the quality we have come to expect from the US wargames companies. A sturdy five piece jigsaw makes up the mapboard, which shows the Pas de Calais and the whole of south-east England covering 11 Group and parts of 10 and 12 Groups. Plenty of targets are marked on the hex-grid, though these consist either of airfields or radar stations.

The colourful counter mix consists almost entirely of aircraft markers, representing either RAF squadrons or German formations of approximately *Staffeln* size. These are marked with aircraft silhouettes and unit numbers, although the numerals are in teeny-tiny print – a problem, as we will see later on. The rule book is clear and concise and has plenty of examples for the reader.

A full day in the game consists of sixteen game turns, and the German player spends the first of these forming up his first raids on the four raid assembly hexes over France. On subsequent turns, he moves his face-down stacks of aircraft towards England following flight paths printed on the map.

The number of hexes a 'raid' can move depends on the slowest type of plane in the formation and its composition is not revealed to the RAF player until it crosses

the British coastline. Radar, it seems, plays no part in this detection process and merely exists in the game as something for the Luftwaffe to bomb and blow raspberries at.

The RAF player gets to move after the German and can scramble fighters to intercept raids. RAF squadrons are moved about singly or in pairs and cannot gang up into 'big wings' so as to really stuff the Hun. This is fairly historical as the 'big wings' were never used this early in the campaign and were pretty useless anyway; however I've no doubt there will be some oik in pebble glasses whinging that the game doesn't give him the option. If any RAF units move into a hex containing German planes then they are considered to intercept automatically and the shooting commences.

## BOMBER DUCKSHOOT

Combat is fairly straightforward. Each defending German formation is divided into fighter escorts and bombers. Since the Luftwaffe can put a maximum of six units into a raid, and only three of these can be fighters, there are usually plenty of juicy bombers for the Brylcreem Boys to shoot up. RAF squadrons shoot at the escorts first, totalling the number of *flights* in each squadron, adding a modifier and rolling a die on the Attack Table to determine the number of *individual aircraft* shot down. A marker is moved along a track to note any kills, and if it reaches four kills then a flight is lost from one of the defending units. Once the interceptors have had their go, the surviving escorts can fire back. The interceptors can then shoot up the bombers before the bombers shoot back.

## A DIE TOO MANY

The problem with the combat system is the amount of paperwork and die rolling involved. Each time a player fires he must check a separate roster sheet to find the number of flights in the attacking units and this is made all the more fiddly by the small print of the unit designations. There are up to four die rolls in each dogfight, and each one will net only one or two kills, maximum. Since an average game-turn may easily have several dogfights going on simultaneously, players have to work hard to obtain a few casualties.

The game doesn't seem to pan out with reality here. First, the RAF has complete omnipotence in tracking the incoming raids, and its aircraft have certain success in interception. This means that the British get to fight almost everything that comes at them. Second, although the

overall kill rates are about right for aircraft mixing it in a turning dogfight, they don't allow for the surprise 'bounces' and the turkey shoots that are the staple of air warfare. Furthermore, there is no 'abort' result to send units of either side scurrying away shot up or demoralised, and so both sides keep hammering away at each other until the Germans finish their raid and fly home.

Bombing is straightforward. Once the bombers have reached their target, they get shot at by anti-aircraft fire before dropping their eggs and rolling the die on the Bombing Table. The resulting number of hits are crossed off boxes on the British Target Roster, and if all the boxes are crossed then the Germans get victory points. Victory is straightforward and is assessed on the value of targets bombed and enemy flights shot down.

The campaign game allows players to fight the first eight days of the Battle of Britain, although my experience is that even one day could take a good gaming session to get through. Optional rules allow for fuel, Luftwaffe fighters on *Frei Jagd* missions, and RAF sector commands as well as giving the German player the option of blitzing London from the outset.

As a game, **Fight for the Sky** is fairly simple and playable, but the combat system makes it fiddly, drawn out, and distressingly non-decisive. As a simulation, it fails to be accurate, partly because the designers cannot decide at what level they are trying to simulate the battle. The scale deserves a far more detailed and involved treatment than it gets, although the involved combat system gives the impression of complexity. However, the designers approach the game mechanics in such a simplistic fashion as to be inaccurate in many places and really quite dreary. This is a shame, because it's not a totally bad game. Unfortunately it's not a totally brilliant one either.

Lee Brimicombe-Wood

### Next Issue in WARGAMES:

Ellis Simpson goes over **Arnhem** Bridge en route to **Turning Point** Stalingrad.

Mike Siggins discovers a **World in Flames** so he takes off to **Space: 1889** and browses through GDW's **Soldier's Companion** on his way-through the galaxy.



# WINGLEADER

DESIGNED BY  
ALFRED LEONARDI

PUBLISHED BY  
NOVA

PRICE £19.95



A few years back, Nova produced a jolly little game called *Ace of Aces*, a two player game of First World War fighter combat. The system was beautifully simple. Each player flew a single plane, represented by a picture book showing views of the enemy plane from the player's cockpit. Each turn, both players would secretly choose manoeuvres and engage in a small bit of page flipping in their books to find an end page showing the new relative positions of their aircraft. On those occasions where one of the planes got into a firing position on the other, the pictures would show the firing plane spitting lead death at the enemy.

The original *Ace of Aces* had sets of books for different aircraft types such as slow 'Early', manoeuvrable Rotary powered and fast Inline powered planes; otherwise there was little difference between aircraft. Altitude was ignored except as an optional rule and speed was of no consequence, but all in all the game was simple, fast and fun.

## MUSTANG SALLY

Nova's new game *Wingleader* is a refinement of that same system but it has been updated to the Second World War. The game comes in a large box (a sop to the retailers who find big boxes easier to display) which contains the two books, rules and a wad of performance charts.

The books themselves are in the old *Ace of Aces* format and depict views of an American P51 Mustang and a German Fw190 from the cockpits. At the risk of sounding a little chauvinistic, I suggest it would have been far better if they had depicted views of a Spitfire versus an Me109. No fighters in the Second World War were more distinctive than the elliptical winged Spitfire and the knife-winged Messerschmitt, or symbolised the air war more than these two. However, this is a minor quibble that doesn't detract from the game.

The main difference between *Wingleader* and *Ace of Aces* is that the new game includes performance charts for different aircraft. In total there are stats for 24 planes including British, American, Soviet, German, Italian and Japanese types. The heart of these charts are the five joystick settings which range from vertical right and left banks to level bank

## FANCY FLIGHT LIMITATIONS

Each bank setting lists the manoeuvres the aircraft can perform when in that bank, and the bank it will end up in for next turn, depending on the manoeuvre chosen. Some of the fancier flight manoeuvres take more than one turn to complete and consist of a sequence of actions. The net effect of this is to limit the manoeuvring of some planes and emphasise performance differences. These differences are often small, but enough to give one or both planes some advantage over each other. An additional rule gives 'faster' aircraft (based on maximum level speed) the advantage of a free move every few turns, much to the slower plane's annoyance.

## DAMAGE BY LETTER

Combat in *Wingleader* is also somewhat different from its predecessor. Whenever a plane gets the enemy in its sights, the page gives a small letter notation ranging from A to G, and the aircraft performance charts show the amount of damage done on each letter. What this does is to include the effects of range and deflection into the combat system.

The damage system is straightforward. When a fighter's damage rating (given on its performance chart) reaches zero, it becomes an ex-aeroplane. Additional rules are given in the game for altitude and the like, but these don't seem to sit very well with the rest of the system.

Overall, *Wingleader* is a fast, simple, excellent game, fully deserving of its four star status. But as a simulation it bears very little relation to the real thing. Altitude and speed are not simulated properly, and all the aircraft really do is to scud about in circles. The whole effect is rather like an arcade game, and like most such games it also gets a little tiresome after repeated playings.

However, for those wishing for some quick, fun entertainment that is accessible to novice and non-gamers, I can wholeheartedly recommend this one. Chocks Away!

*Lee Brimmicombe-Wood*

## CHARTS

### Wargames

- ① Imperium Romanum (West End)
- ② Harpoon (GDW)
- ③ RAF (West End)
- ④ Desert Steel (West End)
- ⑤ Air Superiority (Avalon Hill)
- ⑥ Ambush (Victory)
- ⑦ Beyond Valour (Avalon Hill)
- ⑧ Team Yankee (GDW)
- ⑨ Red Storm Rising (TSR)
- ⑩ Last Battle (GDW)

*Chart supplied by Virgin Games.*

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**8th ARMY**

DESIGNER UNKNOWN

PUBLISHED BY  
**ATTACTIX**

PRICE £9.95



'8th Army is a fast moving game of the see-saw campaigns in North Africa between December 1940 and January 1943' says the blurb on the back of this rather weighty box. It's not a new game – the publication date is given as 1982 – but the Attactix range is due for re-release and a number of new titles may be added to the range. The game is packaged in a deep and sturdy A4 box. The cover artwork is quite attractive compared with many other desert wargames which tend to have rather bland box covers. The components themselves are of good quality and well above standard for a game of this price.

The map board is complemented by 100 large, clear back-printed counters which add to the ease of play. Each combat counter is adorned with a large, beautifully drawn silhouette that gives it a three-dimensional appearance. On a seven year old game, this begs the question as to why so many modern games are published with run-of-the-mill and unimaginative graphics. The only other feature on the counter face is a large number that indicates the unit's combat value. I must admit that even if only for the sake of historical credibility, I like to see a unit's designation printed on the counter.

Unfortunately the rule book falls short of the quality feel of the rest of the game. The rules are contained in eleven pages and the centre pages of the rule book should be removed to provide four clear and well designed player aid cards. A six-sided die and a counter tray are also provided, though the tray doesn't have a lid – you'll have to store the box flat.

If you have never played a wargame before, you will appreciate the manner in which the rules are presented. They are divided into four groups: introductory, basic, intermediate and advanced. In the introductory section, only three pages of the rules need to be read before play can begin, giving players the rudiments of the game. Too much cannot be expected of the introductory scenario – it is only a

teaching aid which nobody should need or want to play more than once. Both reading the rules and playing the scenario should take no more than 40 minutes.

The basic section builds on the concepts already given, introduces replacements and expands upon supply. As with the introductory game, the scenario is not satisfying and is for learning only. Players should quickly be able to move on to the intermediate section, which brings one to an acceptable level of play and introduces reinforcements, troop withdrawals, leaders, air units, building fortifications and gaining new supply.

At the end of this section, there are six serious scenarios that can now be played – Wavell's Offensive, Rommel's First Offensive, Operation Crusader, Rommel's Second Offensive, the Alamein Offensive and the campaign game. Players may also choose to adopt the optional rules that give a little more body to some of the game mechanics.

The individual scenarios are quite short, being typically three or four turns in length, fast-playing, and while each offers interesting situations, I have not been tempted to play each more than twice. Players will probably gain most satisfaction from the campaign game. This lasts for 26 turns and is obviously more replayable than the shorter scenarios – particularly so when the advanced rules are used, introducing the air and naval struggle in the Mediterranean which became vital to the supply situation in North Africa. It is only at this point that the game has any real value and the designer is able to demonstrate the relationship of the main land battle with external factors in the Mediterranean.

The narrow map contains two playing areas: the operational map which allows the ground battle to be fought and which stretches from Alexandria to El Agheila, and the strategic display, which shows the African coastline from Alexandria to Gibraltar, the Mediterranean and its islands, plus the lower parts of Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey. Overlaid are the shipping lanes, air routes, naval bases and air bases that were used throughout the campaign.

Using the advanced rules with both the operational and strategic maps gives a good feel of the campaign and allows both players a variety of strategies to experiment with. I must admit to being surprised that this was such a successful simulation as the opening games under the introductory and basic rules are simplistic in the extreme.

While layered rules offer a great advantage to learning the system, they equally become a burden to the user once the advanced section is digested. Pertinent rules are scattered throughout the rule book with no real organisation; some earlier rules are later replaced or expanded on in later sections and without an index it can be difficult to find specific rules. This is counter-productive to the concept of encouraging novices to play by a gentle introduction. Wargamers who don't play regularly may be put off by the problems of rule consultation as they get further into the system. However, the rule book is liberally dosed with comprehensive examples of play that a beginner to wargames would find useful if not essential.

Most aspects of the game are handled by simple but effective mechanics. Combat uses differentials rather than the more common odds ratio method and a nice feature is that before a final attack value is determined, the values are adjusted by the types of units engaged – which encourages both players to pay attention to combined arms.

Although combat is essential in the execution of wargames, in **8th Army**, the focal point of the game is supply. To win, a player must master the supply rules and understand their implications. Lack of supply will severely restrict a player's ability to take war to the enemy and eventually force an army to retreat on to its supply base. The advanced game gives substantial coverage to supply with the inclusion of merchant shipping, bringing supply into even sharper focus. The game is a useful study of the Mediterranean as a theatre of war.

**8th Army** does have a strong historical flavour. As an introductory game, it has its limitations due to the 'layered' system adopted by the rules, (despite this being designed to help introduce the game), but at £10 a copy, this might be considered a fair buy for the uninitiated. Also, at that price it may be a good buy if the North Africa campaign is of secondary interest to you, but you fancy a dabble.

If you want to refight the campaign on a more tactical scale then **8th Army** is not for you and I would suggest Quarterdeck's **Rommel's War** or 3W's **Rommel at Bay** series would be more appropriate. If you are interested in the wider aspects of land warfare by including the whole Mediterranean scene and the interrelationships between land, naval and air forces then **8th Army** is a good buy.

*Norman Smith*



**DESIGN NOTES**

# Hex sides are better than hexes

Dave Berry

People have been designing and playing boardgames for years. You would think that by now a range of basic systems would have been developed that brook little improvement, leaving the designers to get on with the interesting parts of their games. Movement systems, for example. However, many games use a movement system which could be greatly improved.

I want to see the eradication of all systems that determine the cost to move into an area by the terrain of that area. Games work much better if the cost is determined by the terrain of the border crossed to enter the area. This is particularly true of hex based games.

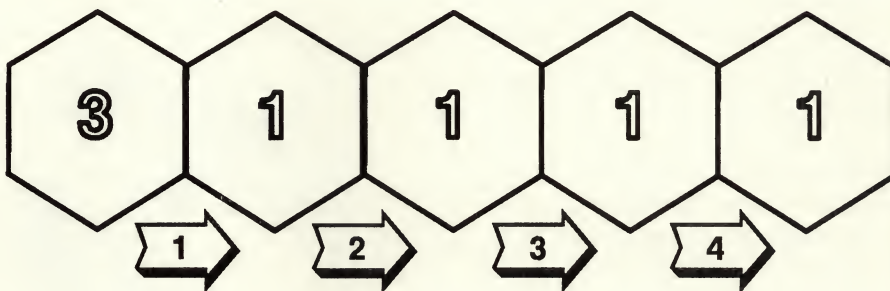
This avoids a common anomaly. Suppose a unit with four movement points is in a woods hex adjacent to a plain, and that woods hexes cost three points to enter and plains hexes only one. This unit can move four hexes away from its current position in one turn. If it then tries to move back, it will only be able to move as far as the hex adjacent to its original starting place. In other words, it will not be able to cover the same ground in the same time.

The first two diagrams, shown opposite, illustrate this. The numbers in the hexes indicate the cost to enter them. The costs in the arrows show the cumulative movement cost.

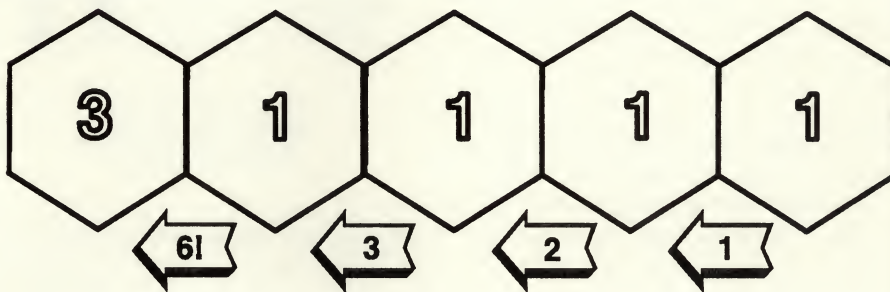
If movement costs depend on the hexsides crossed, this anomaly disappears. If a woods *hexside* costs three and a plain hexside one, for example, the unit can cover the same distance in each turn.

The third and fourth diagrams illustrate this case. Here the number above the hexsides indicate the cost to cross them. As before, the numbers in the arrows show the cumulative movement cost.

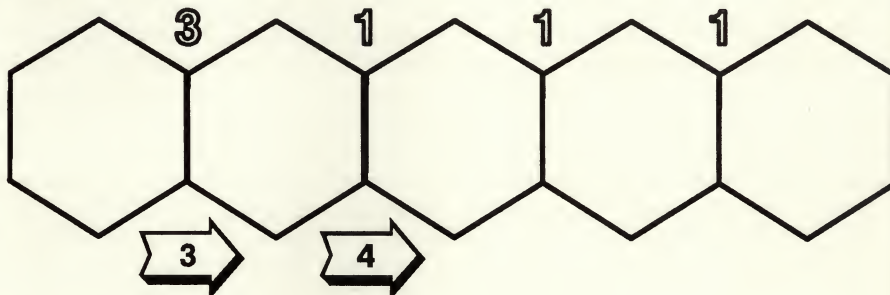
Turn One



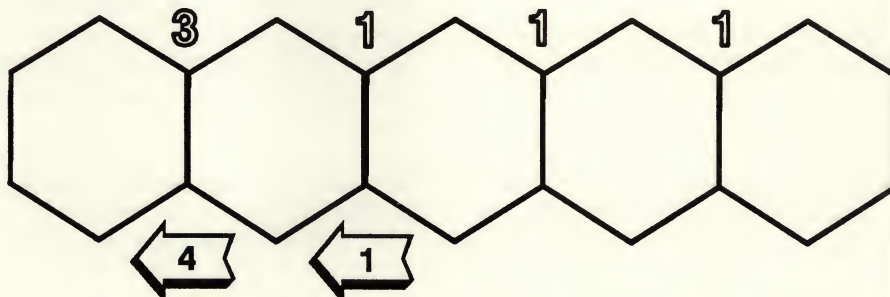
Turn Two



Turn One



Turn Two





Besides avoiding this anomaly, hexside based systems allow maps to show more detail. I've noticed this with my Lord of the Rings game, particularly around the Old Forest and Cirith Ungol. One of the things I liked about the ICE game *Fellowship of the Ring* is that it used a hexside based system. I had already developed my system by then – if I hadn't, I would have copied their idea!

Of course so terrain is harder to cross one way than the other. For example, in *Wilson's Creek* (one of SPI's Great Battles of the American Civil War), it costs more to move up a crest than down it. A crest is the change in elevation, but even though the game assigns an elevation level to each hex, the movement cost depends on the difference between the elevations in adjacent hexes. That is, the cost is for moving across a hexside rather than for entering a hex.

Another example is a unit in formation leaving a wood. This would cost more than entering the wood, because the unit will have lost formation while moving through the wood and will have to regroup. Although hexside based games don't capture this nuance (it really needs a rule on unit order), hex based game (without such a rule) make leaving the wood cost less than entering it!

For combat in a hexside based game the defender can receive a benefit if all attackers are attacking across difficult terrain, or attackers can be penalised individually for the terrain they attack across. If amphibious invasions are allowed, the terrain on the coast can be used.

If you still need hexes, as well as hexsides, to have particular terrain types (such as elevation levels, or perhaps for attrition rules), either consider a hex to have the terrain most common among its hexsides, or add a small dot in each hex to mark the dominant terrain, like the dots used for the visibility rules in *Squad Leader*. Features such as supply centres or resource centres should be hex based so that the occupation of them is unambiguous. Usually these features don't affect movement or combat, so this isn't a problem.

Finally, I find a hexside based system makes writing rules easier, particularly if the game already has some hexside features, such as rivers. It's simpler to explain a system that measures all movement costs the same way than it is to explain one where different terrain features affect movement costs in different ways. G

## NAPOLEONIC GAMES

# 'A damn close run thing'

—Arthur Willesley, aka the Duke of Wellington, describing the Battle of Waterloo.



### Mike Siggins

As a rule, you will find three surefire historical periods in any boardgame company's catalogue: the Second World War, Modern and Napoleonic. Much has been written about why these periods are the most popular but no one has yet presented a convincing argument. Whatever, the fact remains that games on these topics sell well. My favourite of the three is the Napoleonic era and in the following survey I hope to offer brief outlines on the games that are worthy of your consideration. A conscious attempt has been made throughout to keep to currently available products, though the few that are out of print are marked 'OOP' accordingly and can easily be found from the likes of Second Chance Games. Needless to say, there are many more games available on the second hand market, especially the older ones from SPI, but these can be left for you to discover.

For ease of discussion, I have grouped the games into three main areas: Strategic, Operational and Tactical. The latter covers single battles of the era, whether they be a minor skirmish or Bo-

rodino, at the individual battlefield level. Operational games are a step up from here and usually have a map covering the area over which a specific campaign was fought, concentrating on the divisional or corps level. Strategic games are concerned with entire theatres of operation, or indeed the whole of Europe, and often involve naval activity, production, diplomacy and the like. Additionally, I have also provided another special category covering the few naval games available.

### STRATEGIC GAMES

True strategic games are still few and far between. For this reason, only two games will be covered in depth. I suspect the reason for the scarcity is simply the scope and size of the subject. Any game hoping to cover the salient points of the Napoleonic Wars will, of necessity, become a monster. The main fault of the big games is the need for artificial restraints on the players because Napoleon was very rarely at war with everyone in Europe at once. To prevent the allied players ganging up and steaming into the poor French player, most of the games stipulate treaties or time limits that must be adhered to. Even worse are rules that cause countries to change allegiance without due cause. It is a difficult problem and I am not sure if it is one that can be solved easily.

By far the most playable of the strategic games available is *War & Peace* (Avalon Hill), designed by Frank Davis. This game owes a lot to *Frederick the Great* (SPI/Avalon Hill – both games OOP) but nevertheless works acceptably well for the later Napoleonic period. The rules are clear if a little wordy and the scenario lists could be more enticing. The four mapboards cover the whole of Europe from Spain to Russia but most scenarios are fought on just one or two. The map artwork is less than exciting and the contortions imposed on the geo-



graphy make for a mightily odd projection.

Units are large scale, representing 5000 men per point and are simply infantry or cavalry factors, artillery being factored into combat. Commanders have just one rating for initiative. The game makes light work of the housekeeping elements like attrition, organisation and supply and lets the players get on with the interesting stuff like force marches, supply train raids and large scale battles, the latter featuring an interesting combat matrix system.

**War & Peace** is a game that plays very well, it has smooth and quick systems and feels right for the scenarios offered, which range from the small 1809 Austrian campaign to the invasion of Russia and the entire Peninsula war. Its failing is in trying to scale up the system to cover the entire Napoleonic wars including production centres, navies and diplomacy rules. It is, however, a fine game and it merits repeated playing.

The big rival to **War & Peace**, which appeared to a series of glowing reviews, is **Empires in Arms** (Avalon Hill), originally designed by the talented Australian Design Group. The game system is rather neat, using an area movement system and numerous fresh concepts for combat, movement, and alliances. The latter is especially innovative as it provides for automated minor powers who play themselves to a logical and adequate standard. By all accounts, the campaign game of this is playable by a group of 'keen gamers'. I suspect it would take some weeks of regular play between six or seven players and that, to me, is too much for one game – however good or appealing it may be. That said, what I have played of the system (several small scenarios are provided) does indicate that **Empires in Arms**, unlike **War & Peace**, could probably handle the whole shooting match if required. Ultimately, though, it isn't a great deal of fun to play without the full campaign system.

Also worth a look: **Campaigns of Napoleon** (West End – OOP), **Le Grand Empire** (SimCan – OOP), **La Grande Armee** (SPI/TSR).

## OPERATIONAL GAMES

This section will be short, as much of the subject matter was covered in my **Emperor Returns** review in GI #6. That game is representative of the major system covering this field and the comments made about it also apply in general to **Napoleon at Bay** (Avalon Hill – OOP), **1809**

(Victory) and **Bonaparte in Italy** (OSG – OOP, to be re-published by Clash of Arms). The system, designed by Kevin Zucker, is basically the same for all the series games and the strengths and weaknesses are fairly constant. The choice is left to the buyer as overall it remains a system with flavour and fun, but with some historical drawbacks in detail. Should you find that the system is to your liking, you may eventually want to consider the *magnum opus* of the series – **Struggle of Nations** (Avalon Hill – OOP). This is a large, complex and impressive game which uses a novel system of tiny counters and hexes to depict the entire 1813 campaign in Saxony. I suspect the campaign game, like its strategic cousins above, is unplayable without four or more devoted players (or computer assistance) but the scenarios offer much of interest.

The main rival to the **Napoleon at Bay** genre is provided by the series of games using the **Napoleon's Last Battles** (SPI/TSR) system. This was also a Kevin Zucker design, completed at SPI before he moved onto OSG, Avalon Hill and now Clash of Arms. The original game was one of the famed SPI Quads and offers **Wavre**, **Quatre Bras**, **Ligny** and **La Belle Alliance** as individual battles which can be combined to allow the entire Waterloo campaign to be played. The game uses fairly simple basic mechanics and adds rules to simulate a degree of command control and flavour. The outcome is a quick, interesting system that, while not attempting to be the ultimate simulation, makes for a good game.

The best of the four individual games supplied is probably **Wavre**, as the situation is finely balanced, but sadly the **Belle Alliance** game is quite weak in this respect. The real treat, however, is the overall campaign game which is playable within a reasonable time (say four or five hours) and for the effort expended offers a good return. Thankfully TSR had the savvy to re-publish this quad as it is generally accepted as one of the best of SPI's rather variable output. It may now be getting a little dated but you could do far worse.

For those wishing to study the campaign and system in depth, I will also suggest **1815** by GDW, which offers a very similar approach to the Last Battles system while adding a few interesting ideas of its own including a rather clever 'blown' cavalry rule. Unfortunately the rules are both a little unclear and pretty severe in the treatment of morale and artillery. Nevertheless, the graphics and counters are quite neat considering its age and it works well as a game, mainly because

both sides have a good chance of pulling off the win. Not that historical, perhaps, but overall worth investigating.

The final system to consider is the Columbia 'Block System'. No-one is going to claim this is a historical system, least of all the designer, but for a simple game it offers a surprising amount of period feel and suits those times when you fancy a light, fun game with a good deal of decision making. The two games covering the period are **War of 1812** (Columbia) which was reviewed in GI #3 and **Napoleon** (Avalon Hill – OOP) which covers the Waterloo campaign yet again. I described the details of the game in the earlier review so I won't repeat it here, suffice to say it is a good system that shouldn't be dismissed because of its simplistic image.

## TACTICAL GAMES

Games covering the tactical or so called 'grand-tactical' area have, over the years, been heavily influenced by figure gaming concepts. Quite why this should be, given the appalling standard of most of the miniatures rule sets available, I am not quite sure. The result is, for me, a set of games that often nearly make it but which always have at least one flaw – whether that be pace of play, inability to simulate actual events, unclear rules, weak mesh-

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ing of the game systems, poor presentation, or sometimes just overall 'feel'.

Some of the best tactical games are available from Clash of Arms Games in the shape of their 'La Bataille' series. As a full review of **Albuera** appeared in GI #6, there is no need to cover the system again here. The games available are the above **Albuera**, **Talavera**, **Eylau** and **Auerstadt**, although the latter two are now getting scarce. I like this system for its colour and graphics, the rules work once you have struggled through them and the games aren't too long for the size of battle covered.

Another good system is SPI's **Wellington's Victory**, now available from TSR. The TSR game is a four map monster covering the entire battle of Waterloo but those wishing to try the system out on a smaller scale could try **Ney vs Wellington** (supplied with *S&T* 74) which uses the same system for the more manageable battle of Quatre Bras.

The larger game covers the final day at Waterloo in a 50 turn battle game but smaller scenarios such as Hougoumont are supplied. This is useful as, again, very few will have the time or inclination to play the entire battle. The game mechanics owe a lot to miniatures rules and are well thought out, but the good design skills are obscured by a set of long and rambling rules that struggle to convey the game's ideas. Once mastered, the rules permit various realistic formations for the infantry, artillery correctly has a strong bearing on the battle and cavalry, used correctly, can turn a flank in your favour.

My only gripe is with the morale rules, which are a little severe, often resulting in large numbers of routing units. The maps are excellent, showing the all important contours in shades of brown, yellow and buff which, combined with the neat line of sight rules, enable use of the sunken roads and the famous ridge. Unfortunately, the counters are not up to the same standard, appearing rather dark and difficult to read. Overall, probably not up to the Clash of Arms games but worth a try – and it does cover Waterloo which tends to be popular.

One of the more unusual games available in this group is **Marengo** from Historical Concepts. In many ways it is a Napoleonic *aficionado's* game as it simulates a little known battle with a system that requires some effort and takes around four to five hours to play. Not wholly appealing on the face of it, but underneath there is a real gem of a game hidden away. **Marengo** draws heavily on the **Empire**

miniatures rules, which are at the very least above average as rule sets go. A comparison of the **Marengo** game system with the new **Empire IV** rules will be interesting. The outcome is a system that comes close to the feel of an early Napoleonic battle and is probably unsurpassed in terms of its handling of combined arms.

My only complaints are that the game uses some rather plain, nondescript counters which, if given the Marshal treatment, could make the game into a winner, and also that the rules are written in such a way as to make you give up on the game. Like **Up Front**, **Marengo** is a game that is better learned from another player rather than the rules. If anyone has tried the other games in the survey and are still looking for something a little unusual, then **Marengo** is for you.

Another favourite is the unique **System 7** released by GDW some years ago which is now sadly out of print. Falling somewhere between boardgames and miniatures, the system comprised a set of pretty dire rules and several sets of large, beautifully printed colour counters for each of the combatants which would be used on a miniatures style terrain layout. The idea was basically sound. The assumption was a figure size of 7mm and the bases corresponded to figure bases for companies and squadrons.

You bought bags of counters as required which enabled you to field substantial armies cheaply and the units looked very impressive laid out on a green baize cloth. The theory was similar to the Marshal approach, that is, if the counters looked good enough the gamers wouldn't miss the figures so much but they would save on painting time and costs. To an extent, this was proved correct and **System 7** enjoyed some early success, especially since you can use the counters with virtually any set of rules. However, GDW saw fit to cancel the range – no doubt due to poor sales. The sets are still readily available on the second hand market, especially in the States and combined with Wargames Research Group or **Empire** rules, **System 7** remains a very appealing concept and game system.

As a final note on this area, what should be interesting is a new set of miniatures rules from Avalon Hill which should be launched this summer, possibly at Origins. A full review will appear in GI as soon as they have been investigated.

Also worth a look: **Salamanca** (SSG), **The Thin Red Line/The Great Redoubt** (Yaquinto), **The Battle of the Moskowa**

(GDW/Weekend Warrior), **The Battles of Eckmuhl/Abensberg** (WWW)

## NAVAL ACTIONS

Aside from numerous sets of miniatures rules, there isn't a great range of boardgames on the subject of Napoleonic naval battles. Neither are there, to my knowledge, any that allow the recreation of large battles such as Trafalgar on a ship by ship basis. Most concentrate on the smaller actions with immense detail. Luckily, what is available is very good.

The doyen of them all is **Wooden Ships & Iron Men** (Avalon Hill) which has been a stalwart of their range, and **Battleline's** before that. The game covers the actions at individual ship level and works well. All the scenarios are historical, and while the system doesn't permit the **Trafalgars** or **Niles** of this world, some medium sized actions can be simulated if you have the time required. There is no shortage of detail; crews, each rated for skill, have the option of firing roundshot or grape at hull or rigging, ships have to be correctly sailed to take best advantage of the wind and to manoeuvre for deadly raking fire and, once the range is closed, grappling, boarding actions and prizes are all covered. Throw in a few privateers and fireships and this game has everything. I like this game for its excellent atmosphere (it is even better with model ships) and I am sure it will be around for a few years yet.

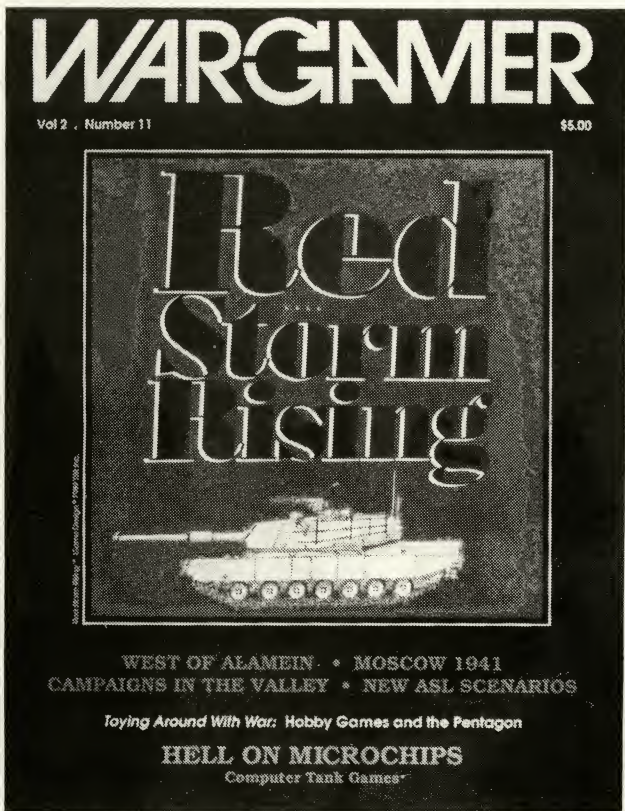
The other recent addition to this field is **Enemy in Sight** (Avalon Hill). This is a card game that is very similar in mechanics to Avalon Hill's earlier **Naval War**. While it makes a good, fun game for three or four players and has bags of atmosphere, it cannot be said to be overly historical. A full review of this game appeared in GI #1.

Also worth a look: **Fighting Sail** (SPI – OOP), **Privateers & Gentlemen** (FGU)

That is, I hope, a useful run through of the games covering the Napoleonic period. With the exception of **Empires in Arms**, **Moskowa** and the full game of **Wellington's Victory**, I have played all of them regularly and, despite some faults, find them worthy of repeated playing. As ever the survey represents personal views but hopefully some readers will be sufficiently interested to try some of the games mentioned. For me, the underlying paradox is that despite the vast numbers of games on the subject not one system, strategic or tactical, has yet come close to the ideal game. G



# One is good. Two is better. Combine the best.



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## REVIEWS

# role games

## TROLLPAK

DESIGNED BY  
CHAOSIUM (GREG  
STAFFORD & SANDY  
PETERSEN)

PUBLISHED BY  
AVALON HILL

PRICE £12.80



**TrollPak** is a boxed supplement to **RuneQuest**, set in the fantasy world of Glorantha. It consists of a comprehensive analysis of the Uz or, as humans know them, trolls. Almost every aspect of the Uz is examined, from their crude military practices to their redoubtable digestive systems, and the Pak convincingly transforms simple monsters into believable, complex inhabitants of the world of Glorantha.

### THE THREE OF UZ

The 'meat' of the Pak is three booklets. The first, 'Uz Lore', contains many rare and unusual items such as ancient troll songs, transcripts of interviews with trolls and trollkin, scientific drawings of troll anatomy, maps of famous troll battles and so on, all of which flavour the Pak exquisitely.

A full history of the Dark Men is laid out, from pre-Time to the current campaign year of 1621 ST, and Dagori Inkarth and the Redstone Caverns have space devoted to them.

Scattered throughout the book, to the side of the main text, are numerous notes which make fascinating reading. Almost from the first page it becomes easy to forget that this is supposed to be a supplement for a rolegame; many a pop scientist would be proud of the authenticity that Stafford and Petersen have instilled in their work.

Book Two, 'The Book of Uz', contains troll character generation along with statistics for the various troll relations found throughout Glorantha. A wealth of background detail is offered here, with a long look at the principal troll goddess, Kyger Litor, and her cult. This runs nicely into a wider examination of troll society where the military is also discussed and again one drifts off into the delights of 'realism'. Giant arthropods (which the Uz raise as food, beasts of burden, for their chitin as armour, and many other uses) are given the treatment too.

### A MUNCH TOO FAR

Book Three, 'Munchrooms', is a scenario of gargantuan proportions. The Tale goes that the Gardens of Boorbar have long been farmed by an army of trollkin slaves, producing (mostly) edible and (some) magical mushrooms for their Dark Troll masters. A number of fortuitous (from the trollkin point of view) events took place which led to a successful rebellion of the kin. They promptly gathered the year's harvest and sold it for cash with which to purchase both animate and inanimate defences against the troll punishment raid which surely must come.

Your players have the opportunity to get involved as defending trollkin characters, attacking troll characters, or mercenaries hired by one side or the other. This monster will be played over a number of sessions and should provide you with hours upon end of fun. All the statistics a lazy referee could possibly want are here, along with one of those weird 3-D troll maps!

### TROLL MENUS

Also contained in the Pak are troll adventure sheets and a huge 30" x 22" colour map of Dagori Inkarth, stretching from Rockwood Mountains across the northern boundary as far south as Apple Lane in Sartar and the Dead Place in Prax. Finally, the menu from Thunderbreath Gobbleguts' restaurant chain is more professional than some genuine menus it has been my displeasure to read. It includes such delights as: 'Live Ham Beetle, pinned to your edible plate with a sharp-

ened sprig of Runner; Roof Rats on the side and a delicious Cockroach sauce . . . only 30 bolgs!' Or if it's just a snack you're after, try the batter-fried Pixies with a side of amplit bread and a mug of Snake Wine to wash it down.

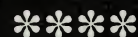
Long-term **RuneQuesters** will remember that **TrollPak** was originally published in 1982 by Chaosium. This reprint is shorter than the original, missing out as it does four scenarios, the rules for **TrollBall**, the full write-up of six troll gods and detail on the Sazdorf Clan.

Having said that, the Munchrooms scenario is vastly expanded; three of the missing scenarios and the Trollball rules have already been reprinted in **Into the Troll Realms** (reviewed in GI #1); full troll cult information will certainly appear in **Troll Gods** (due out soon); I'm sure the Sazdorf Clan (and the other missing scenario) will resurface in expanded versions in the proposed **The Sazdorf Clan**. But yes, you've guessed it. You

## Star Ratings



One of the greats, a must buy



Full of good ideas, a fine product



Solid but not exceptional



For completists only, a lacklustre product



A true turkey



poor suckers are expected to buy *four* supplements to get what we old hands bought in one back in 1982. That's inflation for you.

When I reviewed *Into the Troll Realms* in issue 1, Avalon Hill subsequently ticked me off for not mentioning that all the statistics had been reworked into the new **RQ3** format and that there was some new artwork. In the second edition **TrollPak**, all the statistics have been reworked into the new **RQ3** format and there is some new artwork. I'd guess, though, that if you have the old **TrollPak** and you've changed your campaign to **RQ3**, then you've probably converted all the statistics yourself after seven years. You've almost certainly played through the *Munchrooms* too, so the expanded version is hardly something to write home about. And I'm prepared to bet hard cash you'll prefer the old artwork to the new. As I said about *Into the Troll Realms*, if you have the first edition **TrollPak**, then there's nothing here for you.

However, if you are a **RuneQuester** and *don't* have the old **TrollPak**, give up searching for those almost unobtainable second-hand copies that sell for anything upwards of £30. Go out and buy this **TrollPak** *now*. Boy, are you in for a treat! The contents are fascinatingly informative, endlessly useful and will add an inestimable amount of 'colour' to your campaign. There's an old saying among humans in Glorantha: 'Don't drink a troll's drink', which translates as 'Don't be a plonker, Rodney.' If you're a **RuneQuester** without a **TrollPak**, then you're knocking the stuff back by the crateload.

*Philip A Murphy*

#### In next issue's **Rolegames**:

**Cities Special**: the first part of a look at urban adventure, including reviews of new products from TSR and Steve Jackson.

Reviews of **GURPS Conan**, modules for **D&D** and **AD&D**, and the latest release in Mayfair's *City State of the Invincible Overlord* series.

Also, owing to an explosion in the Belfast sorting office our Northern Island correspondent, Rev John Scott's review of *Griffin Mountain* failed to arrive, but, God willing, we'll have it for you next issue.

# THE BROKEN COVENANT OF CALEBAIS

(ARS MAGICA SCENARIO)

DESIGNED BY  
JONATHAN TWEET AND  
MARK REIN-HAGEN

PUBLISHED BY  
LION RAMPANT

PRICE £5



As someone who found *Ars Magica* (reviewed in GI #4) one of the richest and most flavoursome rolegames to appear in several years, I was slightly disappointed by this adventure supplement. The basic plot involves the destruction of the covenant of Calebais. Since anything capable of destroying one covenant might also be a threat to others, the player-characters are dispatched to investigate.

Entry into the covenant (through the 'Veil' that kept it hidden from outsiders) involves a series of riddle-encounters. This is well-handled and rather more than an excuse for the usual puzzle solving. Once in the covenant, the characters find the ghosts of the magi still active and engrossed in the feuding that split their group apart and led to the covenant's destruction half a century before. Appropriately for a game which seems to evoke more than a touch of *Averoigne* and *Ascolais*, the ghosts are treated in a whimsical matter-of-fact way. They are more bizarre than frightening – at least at first...

Disappointments crept in with the treasure (a boring McGuffin) and the over-mapped 'dungeon' feel. Minor annoyances include the knight, Gilbert Montpalier, who is constantly referred to not as 'Sir Gilbert' but as 'Sir Montpalier'. The final encounter is good for a touch of cold grue, but too jarringly stage-managed. (Though, to give the authors their due, I suspect they only put it in as a crowd pleaser.) The illustrations are remarkably bland, with the exception of a couple of medieval engravings. It's a shame, with all the high quality historical

illustrations that exist and which could be used, that modern rolegames all too often take the approach of their characters being twentieth century westerners in modern clothing.

Bland too are the fictional embellishments running parallel to the story. Here the authors display a brutish disregard for the nobility of the English sentence. The prose style can best be described as Belgarigook, and augurs ill for the promised *Ars Magica* novel.

Overall, a good story but with only a few flashes of the real brilliance that characterised *Ars Magica*. Possibly it makes too many self-conscious concessions to being 'commercial'. I suspect that the refreshing approach of the original *Ars Magica* book has been staled by feedback, and hence awareness of its popularity.

Nonetheless it is streets ahead of any scenario material coming from any other publisher at the moment, and I look forward to continuing improvements in future *Ars Magica* supplements.

*Dave Morris*

## CHARTS

### Rolegames

- ① AD&D 2nd Ed DM's Guide (TSR)
- ② AD&D 2nd Ed Player's Handbook (TSR)
- ③ Star Wars Rules Companion (West End)
- ④ GURPS Supers (Steve Jackson)
- ⑤ Conklin's Atlas (Space: 1889, GDW)
- ⑥ Rolemaster (ICE)
- ⑦ Tales of the Loremasters I (Shadow World, ICE)
- ⑧ Call of Cthulhu (Chaosium)
- ⑨ Shadow World Master Atlas (ICE)
- ⑩ Mount Gundabad (MERP, ICE)

*Chart supplied by Virgin Games.*





# ROLE CALL

## Paul Mason

Now that there have been eight issues of GI you should have a reasonably clear idea of the approach taken in the role-game section. But just in case you haven't, I'll take this opportunity to spell it out while appealing for some feedback.

Back in the good old days (or the bad old days, as they felt like at the time) the role-game products available were by no means as polished as they are now. Companies were still feeling their way, and the small-but-growing rolegame market was sufficiently omnivorous that even the most egregious drivel from Judges Guild would sell. Because there was so little on the market, and what there was tended to be ambiguous, the noble institution of house rules sprang up. Gamers restructured their games to reflect the way *they* wanted to play.

As the quality of rolegame products got better, and we started getting games like **RuneQuest**, **MERP**, **Pendragon** and **GURPS**, gamers began to find that they were more likely to be able to play games 'straight out of the box'. Luckily, however, they still tended to retain their questioning attitude – they still felt that the game was theirs, to be played exactly how they wanted to. An atmosphere was generated in which newer players, too, acquired such an attitude.

GI's rolegame section is aimed at role-players who have this attitude. Too often, nowadays, rolegamers seem to be slaves to the companies, lapping up whatever is produced for their favourite system with an uncritical attitude comparable only to a three-toed-sloth on valium. This doesn't do anyone any good in the long run. What games designer is happy with an audience that will give him the same response whether his game is superb or rubbish?

(Answer: one who no longer has any interest in rolegames.)

Inevitably, a critical approach leads to disagreement. Sometimes, companies get all huffy and stop sending review copies and advertising. But the better companies know that anything that encourages people to have an intelligent interest in rolegames benefits them in the long run. I've got around fifty rolegames myself, mainly because I'm interested in seeing what makes a game tick – even if it's a bad game. Without a critical and enquiring mind I'd have far fewer – and that would mean less profit for the games companies.

Disagreement also crops up among players of games that we review. A certain element of opinion is always going to appear in a review, and as an editor I don't regard this as a bad thing. If this leads to mistakes, we would hope that you would write and point them out. And while you're about it, why not write and let us know about the games you play. Obviously space for rolegames is limited, but we're not above printing scenarios or other material, as long as we can be reasonably sure that they're going to be of use to some of you.

### TURN TO PARAGRAPH . . .


One of the latest releases from TSR which *won't* be reviewed in these pages is a Forgotten Realms product called **The Knight of the Living Dead**. An arbitrary decision? No, we simply can't afford to embrace the full breadth of the hobby that now goes under the name of 'role-playing'. **The Knight of the Living Dead** may be set in an AD&D game world, but it's a gamebook nevertheless. If we review this then we would also by rights have to review the most successful gamebook series – *Fighting Fantasy*. And then, to be fair, we'd have to cover other

series such as *Lone Wolf*, *Blood Sword* and even *Robin of Sherwood* gamebooks (I kid you not – I wrote one of them!). It's not impossible, though, that something about gamebooks might creep into this column at some time in the future.

### FAMOUS NAMES

By now you should be familiar with most of our regular writers. Rumours that a conspiracy is afoot to infest GI with former *White Dwarf* staff and writers is entirely false. Nevertheless we anticipate seeing a lot more material from Ian Marsh (who took over as editor of *White Dwarf* from Ian Livingstone) in the future: Ian will be covering **Space: 1889** since he plays it more regularly than I. He's also privileged enough to receive press releases and free games from America in his capacity as *Adventurer* news columnist. Well, yes, I know *Adventurer* folded years ago, but news travels slowly out in the colonies, chaps.

This issue we see a review from Dave Morris, who pointed out that that the films listed in the previous issue were not all *samurai* movies – but that the best of them were *heimin* movies (Dave also pointed out that he wasn't pedantic enough to criticise the use of italics to distinguish Japanese terms such as *samurai*). Dave's breadth of knowledge of feudal Japan recently scooped him an especially prestigious appointment: Dave is writing the novelisations of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Oliver Johnson, who used to write the half of *White Dwarf* not written by Dave Morris, makes his debut this issue with other newcomer Steve Jones tackling **Shadow World**. I am indebted to Steve for pointing out to me that in first edition **Traveller 2300** all rolled characters would start the game unconscious. That's my kind of game, folks! 



# World

## SHADOW WORLD MASTER ATLAS

DESIGNED BY  
TERRY K AMTHOR

PUBLISHED BY  
ICE

PRICE £9.95



Iron Crown Enterprises are most famous for their **Middle-earth Role-Playing Game**, based on their **Rolemaster** system. As a result, very little has been published for **Rolemaster** itself. ICE also publish several games under the Hero Games label, including **Fantasy Hero**, which also has too few supplements. So ICE have produced **Kulthea**, the **Shadow World**, which is specifically designed to provide a campaign world for **Rolemaster** and **Fantasy Hero**. It also has notes for conversion to any other fantasy game system.

### PAGE 12

The box features beautiful cover art, and contains a 64 page **World Guide**, a 64 page **Inhabitants Guide**, a 32 page **Atlas Addendum**, a very large and colourful map, and the legendary 'Page 12' (about which more later).

The **World Guide** starts off with the astronomy of **Kulthea's** solar system, and its long history. **Kulthea** is set in the same universe as **Space Master**, and is the home planet of the **Althans**, ancient masters of technology and psionics. This may explain why **Kulthea** is the only known planet in the galaxy where magic works, and the gods really do live on its largest

moon, **Orhan**. Scientists who come to **Kulthea** tend to leave in straitjackets.

**Kulthea** possesses a great variety of races and cultures, who live on the many islands and small continents. Travel on **Kulthea** is difficult because of dangerous ocean currents and the mysterious **Flows of Essence**, which produce physical barriers between many parts of the planet. Only the most powerful mages can penetrate these barriers, and direct the **Flows** to their own ends.

### ONLY THIRTY DICE!

**Kulthea** has many local gods, but the **Lords of Orhan** possess the most widespread religion. Full characteristics for the entire pantheon are given over nine pages, which is a waste of space. Anyone who attacks them is going to die quickly.

Two powerful organisations on **Kulthea** itself are the **Loremasters** and the **Navigators**. **Loremasters** are secretive but well intentioned, so they provide the guidance needed to destroy evil, but do not intervene directly. The **Navigators** provide transport by land, sea or teleportation at an extortionate price. The **Unlife**, the ultimate source of evil, is represented by the **Dragonlords** and the **Heralds of Night**. All the sample characters are very high level.

The **World Guide** ends with suggestions for adding **Space Master** technology, and some special spell lists for **Loremasters** and **Navigators**.

The **Inhabitants Guide** begins with an explanation of the abbreviations and codes used to describe the characters and creatures. Some appear to have been accidentally omitted, including the meaning of 'Outlook (IQ)'.

**Plantlife** goes from healing herbs, through poisonous foliage, to plants that fight back. The poison rules are reprinted from **Rolemaster** (not helpful), and not translated into **Fantasy Hero** terms (even less helpful).

### BREEDS CONTEMPT

The creatures will be familiar to players of any other fantasy role-playing game. Dragons breathe fire, cold, poison gas, lightning and water bolts. Giants come in flavours such as **Cloud**, **Fire**, **Frost**, **Hill**, **Stone** and **Storm**. The original monsters are interesting, such as the 'shards', artificial horrors who move at lightning speeds and throw bone discs, or the 'thalan', mysterious beings who can reincarnate into the offspring of any other creature. Most of the monsters are taken straight from **Creatures and Treasures**, another **Rolemaster** supplement.

The **Peoples** section starts with the long-disappeared **Lords of Essence** or **Althans**, a race often mistaken for gods. I have this strange feeling that rumours of their extinction may be exaggerated! Many of the **Immortal** and **Mortal Races** are available as player characters. They include the usual humans, elves and dwarfs, but no hobbits (hurray!), as well as **Centaur**s, **Nymphs** and **Mermen**.

### ONE LINE CREATURES

At the end is a chart of yet more creatures in one-line form. While this is reasonable for all the natural animals with which the players will be familiar, it is pointless to present monsters such as the 'vargamor' or 'capricon' in this way without any explanation. There are attack tables for **Nether Balls** and **Bolts**, and critical tables for **Stress**, **Internal Disruption** and **Acid** (yuck) from the **Rolemaster Companion III**. Finally there is an index to both books, which is an idea many other role-games should copy.

The **Atlas Addendum** has all the game statistics for **Fantasy Hero**, extensive notes on how to convert everything to **AD&D** and **RuneQuest**, and several other bits and pieces which seem to have been left over from the other books: breaking '150' from the **Rolemaster Compendium I**, **Slaying** and **Holy Weapons**, the **Racial Statistics Chart** for



generating nonhuman player characters, maps and the glossary of Kulthean words.

The full colour map is a massive three feet by four feet, and very pretty it is too. It shows the entire western hemisphere of Kulthea, uncluttered with trivia such as cities which, let's face it, no one would want to know the location of anyway. Separate maps in the Atlas Addendum show the 'Essence Flows', volcanic centres and tectonic plates, and weather patterns.

The whole product shows signs of having been rushed into production. Page 12 of

the Inhabitants Guide has a table which is completely illegible (but a readable version is provided loose in the box). In the **Fantasy Hero** section, the Undead and Flying Creatures have been missed out completely. Various pieces have been taken from previous ICE publications, which may leave those who already have them feeling cheated.

**Shadow World** has been written for **Rolemaster**, and then converted to **Fantasy Hero**. All the **Fantasy Hero** stuff is tucked away at the back, and many things are not covered at all, such as the herbs and poisons and the Loremaster and Na-

vigator spell lists. However many extra creatures are added to the limited number of **Fantasy Hero** beasts.

Overall **Shadow World** has not enough specific information that a referee is going to need to run a game set on Kulthea. Presumably this is because ICE do not want to restrict themselves when they develop each continent. It is useful for the monsters, but a **Rolemaster** referee with **Creatures and Treasures** could just as well go straight to the adventure packs instead.

*Steve Jones*

## Adventure Packs

These are four scenario packs for the ICE **Shadow World**: with such a wealth of material it would be surprising if some innovative ideas didn't show through, but too much of it is of the 'seen it and done it all before' variety and referees looking for scenarios suitable for conversion to their own systems would be advised to stick with AD&D modules. Creatures and settings here are the worst side of amorphic (ghouls, orcs, centaurs, gnolls, elves, gorgons, magic isles, demon isles, spriggans, necromantic isles . . .) all mush together into an unpalatable stew: these may be problems endemic with the world of Kulthea, but the wide brief presented with the **Shadow World** concept surely doesn't bar the idea of originality?

### Tales of the Loremasters

This is the most inventive but is also, alas, the shortest of the four. The setting is a string of remote islands one thousand miles west of Emer, although one of the isles, Sinh, is inhabited by humans, the rest provide enjoyable, limited duration mini scenarios which would be easy to incorporate into the framework of a larger campaign. The setting has its original and not so original moments: the hardest inhabitants of Sinh live in huts strapped to the backs of giant turtles.

The unfortunate turtles are in turn venerated and vilified by their human freight depending on whether they are intent on heading where the humans want them to, or diving for shoals of fish, leaving the huts bobbing helplessly on the ocean waves. A hard life, but the interesting pseudo-Polynesian background is spoilt by other cultural/mythological influences: do we really need an island inhabited

by dryads here? Soon Grecian influences make way for Nordic (giants, trolls, and so on) and Celtic (nuckleavee) but generally non player characters are well thought out, particular in the Night Come Soon scenario. \*\*\* 1/2

### Quellbourne

This pack is set in the north of Kulthea. Here a Mannish population struggles to survive in a fog-swept land against ice-kraals, trolls and destroyers of Galathoth—a kind of punk nihilist sect intent on the destruction of everything. Inner city dwellers may well sympathise with the bleak setting where the Unlife and mad cultists are on every underworld corner, but the detailed maps which promise much to a browsing eye, on closer inspection reveal very little of interest. There is too much of the usual fantastic 'and here's the Moot Hall and here's the Herbalists' variety in the major town, Kelfal's Landing, not enough of a strong sustained plot to get referee and players through a session. \*\*\* 1/2

### Journey to the Magic Isle

This scenario pack set on an island near a treacherous Essence flow, where powers can be drained or enhanced in a moment. How this relates to the scenario pack is never clearly explained to the referee, although the somewhat inconceivable 'University of Magic Arts' on which the pack centres may enable sorcerers to improve their stats. Like the American college campus this University resembles, here are plenty of opportunities for the unwitting to get zapped, particularly by a lich lord, the mad professor of the set. The other tutors are too reminiscent of the 'Physics teachers I have known'

variety: vacuous stereotypes spouting gibberish. \*\* 1/2

### Demons of the Burning Night

An interesting title, and even more interesting cover illustration, showing a necromancer in a top board high diver's position on a towering skull-like rock. Unfortunately the referee may soon share the nec's mood when he attempts to get his party through this incredibly tough pack. The island is tipped by the blurb to be 'A breeding place of Chaos'. Surprise, no? Ghouls, cannibals, a ruptured essence that might leave sorcerers out of juice, on the hard shoulder by a demon's lair, but nothing novel here. The demon city Tarak Nev contains the most lacklustre creatures ever spawned in a demonologist's pentacle, a 'Protector' who puts points on a character's armour and shield, a 'Slayer' who pursues enemies until . . . well, until they are slain, and so on. Science elements are thrown in where imagination falters, a detailed map looks good but is not keyed adequately to be of use as a gaming aid.

All in all rather disappointing. Too much of the adventuring involves ability rolls rather than genuine role-playing and clues that the gamers can figure out for themselves. Friendly non player characters are clichéd and creatures are a dull rag bag. \*\* 1/2

Scenario packs set in worlds more coherent than Kulthea are always going to be more successful than these, but persistent referees may be able to extrapolate enough to justify their investment.

*Oliver Johnson*



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# GURPS SUPERS

DESIGNED BY  
LOYD BLANKENSHIP

PUBLISHED BY  
STEVE JACKSON GAMES

PRICE £7.99



'Super-Powered Roleplaying Meets The Real World' announces the cover of the latest addition to the ranks of both GURPS sourcebooks and superhero role-games. Much as I would love to burst its pompous bubble the statement is true by default, since GURPS is a game system with mechanics based firmly in the 'Real World' and GURPS Supers is about 'Super-Powered Roleplaying'. Whether this meeting of worlds succeeds or not is another matter entirely.

## SUPERCRUNCH

Of all GURPS sourcebooks so far, GURPS Supers spends the most time and pages adding to and redefining the system's existing rules. This is understandable since it is the first sourcebook which has had to deal mainly with characters rather than background. The rewriting of a large number of rules (specifically the combat rules, but psionics and martial arts are also substantially changed) shows that GURPS is not a truly generic rolegame and makes GURPS Supers substantially harder to learn. There is a good deal of extra number-crunching involved in character generation and combat; not that this will make any difference to GURPS aficionados but it might deter those of us who like simpler rules systems.

The book itself is nicely designed and clearly laid-out. It has a profusion of interior illustrations which are almost all dreadful, and would not be seen dead in any self-respecting superhero comic. The book starts with sections on character generation, detailing super-abilities and super-powers, and moves on to combat and eventually background. The creation of super-powered characters is clever if a trifle over-complex, fitting well with a game designed around 'building' characters on a points system, apart from one minor slip which advises players to build a normal character first, then add the

super-abilities. As GI's resident comics nut (I write more about comics than I do about games) I can assure you that this is daft. Moreover, it makes character design a much longer process.

## REALISM vs COLOUR

Once the book reaches background, it is suddenly in hot water. More pages are devoted to detailing NPCs than are given to talking about running a superhero campaign. It spends less time on whether campaign worlds should be 'realistic' or 'four-color' than on how to transport super-characters to worlds detailed in other GURPS sourcebooks. This last is a major failing. Superheroes today are hot stuff and superhero games are capitalising on this; for example, Mayfair Games are both revamping the DC Heroes game and producing a special Batman role-playing game (reviewed in the Batman feature this issue).

To spend only 150 words on the problems of superheroes in a 'realistic' world, the emphasis of much of comics' current trendiness, and a similar amount on 'four color' campaigns is not short-sighted, it is downright stupid. Superheroes cannot be divorced from their comics background without major changes of emphasis, and GURPS Supers neither makes these changes nor understands the nature of comic books. 'Think camp' it advises at one point. 'Camp' went out of comics in the 1960s.

More problems arise with the background world that the book provides. This bears a few similarities to the direction in which the DC Comics universe is moving and has a few nice ideas, but is basically a one-quirk world. Its existence within the book in the first place is a mystery. GURPS sells itself as a generic rules system and I would imagine that buyers of this product would expect this sourcebook to be similarly generic, allowing them to simulate Marvel Comics, DC Comics, independent superhero comics and much more. Although the character design section seems to be heading in the right direction, the lack of detail in the section on designing backgrounds, the campaign world and chiefly the book's foundations in the GURPS system, especially the (albeit recalibrated) combat rules tie GURPS Supers down far too hard.

The problem lies in the juxtaposition between the inherently escapist world of superheroes and the doggedly 'realistic' nature of the GURPS system. The author says in his preface that he worried about this but his worries 'proved to be un-

founded – the realism that is the heart of the GURPS system provided a perfect framework to build on'. Well, bollocks. In a GURPS Supers 'realistic' campaign a character with a decent level of the 'laser' skill can kill almost anyone, including most other heroes, in a single combat round. Quite apart from the fact that part of the fun of role-playing superheroes is that combat isn't deadly, this would make it a very short campaign. Accordingly, a large section of the rules advises that players shouldn't maximise their skills – in other words, they should deliberately design duff characters. This is not a problem that the referee should have to handle: it is a design fault that ought to have been rectified.

## NOT SO WILD

For my money, GURPS Supers is flawed. It fails as a general superhero sourcebook because there is too much emphasis on rules changes; it fails as a superhero rolegame because of the over-realism of the GURPS rules; and it fails as a generic sourcebook because it is not generic. Why there was so much emphasis on a not terribly good background (30 of the 112 pages are devoted to aspects of it) when Steve Jackson Games have already announced the forthcoming GURPS Wild Cards background book for superhero campaigns I simply cannot comprehend. With thought, imagination, emphasis on the right areas and a better restructuring of the combat system, GURPS Supers could have been a memorable sourcebook. It is emphatically not.

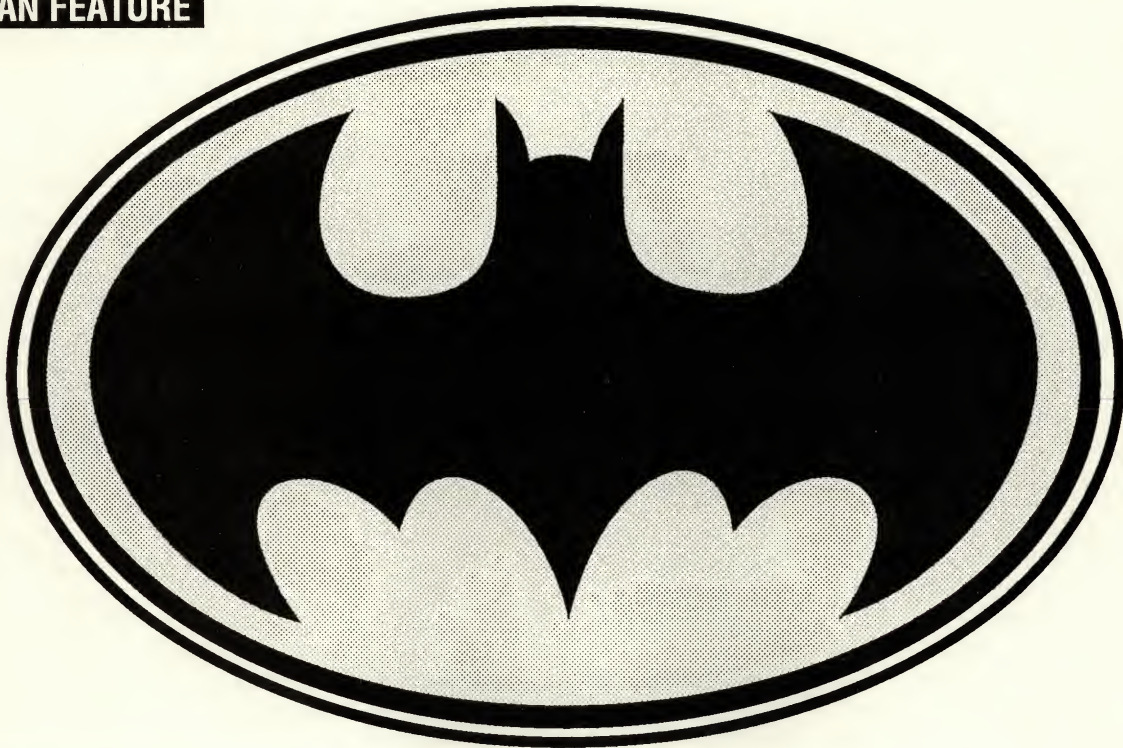
James Wallis

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## BATMAN FEATURE



### THE BATMAN ROLE-PLAYING GAME

DESIGNED BY  
JACK A BARKER

PUBLISHED BY  
MAYFAIR GAMES

PRICE



Recipe: take one established rolegame (**DC Heroes**), add in a blockbuster movie (*Batman*), stir rapidly and serve. Result: lots of money. That, at any rate, is the theory. Quality doesn't enter into it much, so I guess we'll have to consider any good points we come across an unlooked-for bonus. Thankfully, there are a few unlooked-for bonuses in the **Batman Role-Playing Game**.

This chunky 192-page book is the size of a typical American comic or graphic novel. This is good, in that it stresses the comics connection (and will no doubt help the game sell in comic stores), but bad, in that it's not a good format for a game. The pages are too tall and narrow, and the book doesn't stay open easily. The design is simple and fairly clear, with a

few scattered stock pictures. It's not going to win any design awards, but it does the job. However, there are some clear signs of rushed production. In many cases the typographer seems to have gone bananas – words are chopped halfway through at the ends of lines and continue on the next line without any hyphenation. This makes for confusing reading.

The game rather helpfully opens with the basics of the system, and follows them with a short solo scenario to demonstrate them. It's not too exciting (mainly consisting of Batman crawling around a warehouse and effortlessly beating up a couple of thugs) but it does show how to play the game.

The system used here is a cut-down version of **DC Heroes**. There was a time when it seemed to me that all the most innovative, simple and usable game systems were going into superhero games, and **DC Heroes** was one of the games that benefited from a strong concept. Everything could be understood in terms of Action Points (APs), and rather than increasing linearly, each additional AP *doubled* the value of whatever quantity was being expressed. This proved a sensible option for a superhero game, allowing Superman to be represented in game terms without his stats being telephone numbers!

The core of the system comprises two tables, the Action Table and the Result Table. Unlike other sophisticated systems, **DC Heroes** resolved success and

effect separately, but nevertheless connected the two: a strong success improves effect. The distinction between success and effect was made clear through the stats: for example while Dexterity determines your success at landing a blow, Strength determines how effective it is. The grid of nine attributes used in **DC Heroes** is elegant and well thought out.

To succeed at a task, the appropriate skill is cross-referenced with the difficulty provided by the opposition. The result is a number which must be exceeded on two ten sided dice. Doubles enable the dice to be rolled again and added to the total. Exceeding the required value by a large amount leads to *column shifts* which affect the result. The Result Table cross-references the appropriate skill or statistic determining the effectiveness of the skill attempt with the opposition's resistance. The result is fixed, and is expressed as a number of Action Points, usually less than the value of the skill or attribute. Column shifts obtained increase the number of Action Points in the result.

All in all the system works well, but in the **Batman** game it has a number of problems. First: the all-important tables are printed once each, on different pages. As I've already mentioned, the book doesn't stay open too easily, and for some reason a pullout reference chart with these tables on is not provided. This is a serious omission which hampers the game's immediate playability, and since many purchasers of the game will be comics



fans, unversed in the many mystic ways of rolegaming, immediate playability is at a premium.

Secondly, while the system reflects the spread of superhero combats fairly well, it feels strange when applied to the Batman. Even though he exists in the 'DC Universe', a ridiculous hodgepodge of superheroes, the Batman always had the dignity to carry off his own pocket universe. This is a far lower-powered universe than that surrounding him. Batman is such a successful character partly because he is 'only' a man: when he battles Superman in *The Dark Knight Returns* we are still aware of the vast gulf between the two costumed heroes – it makes the confrontation all the more dramatic. In the **Batman** rolegame, a system designed for a wide spread of power levels is applied to a setting with a fairly narrow spread, and it's obvious. The system lacks definition: it can distinguish well between Batman and the common thug, but less well between the common thug and a better trained thug. The wide focus of the system results in such absurdities as Batman being strong enough to lift over 1000 pounds. I hate to say it, but this is comic-book stuff, and Batman deserves better.

The problem is exacerbated by the presence of rules for creating traditional superheroes. These expand the fairly short list of skills presented in the game, but make it all the more clear that we're in the wacky realm of the DC Universe

here, not the gritty Gotham portrayed in *Dark Knight, Year One, The Killing Joke* and the movie.

Understandably a reasonable amount of space is spent on gadgetry, which in this game is a means for heroes who are not naturally endowed with super powers to act as if they were. These rules are simple, and include a neat rule called the Reliability Number, which determines whether the gadget breaks down in use.

The tips on gamemastering are the standard fare presented in most games, and follow the usual revolting trend of suggesting experience point rewards for good role-playing. Experience is presented in the form of Hero Points, which enable modification of your die rolls in critical circumstances. Just to confirm the deification of Bats, he is given an absurd number of points. This is role-playing by numbers: simulating Batman's ability to do the right thing at the right time by numbers removes most of the challenge from the exercise.

Statistics are given for a selection of friends and foes. Most of these are at around the right power level, and I was particularly pleased to see the Question, a classic hero who specialises in being beaten up. Villains include the most famous of the Dark Knight's adversaries, with the exception of Ras al Ghul (who, if the Anniversary issue 400 of *Batman* is anything to be believed, rivals the Joker as Batman's greatest foe).



After a brief introduction to Gotham City, the game leaps into a scenario, which brings up another serious problem, and presents another absurd solution. Batman is essentially a solitary figure. At certain times Robin has been around to set him off, to be Watson to Batman's Holmes, but the most powerful and pervasive image of the Dark Knight is a solitary figure looming over the rooftops of Gotham, casting his sinister batlike shadow over criminals. This is a game for two people: the referee and the Batman player. But that doesn't make for good sociability. The game suggests a Bat-team recruited by Bruce Wayne from likely potential heroes in the Gotham area. This makes a nonsense of the previously pointed out fact that after the death of Jason Todd (in the overrated *Death in the Family*) Batman resolved never to take another partner. While the *Dark Knight* could be used to argue for a Bat-team, you'd have to be pretty naïve to argue that they were truly commanded by Batman himself. This is a subject that has not been thought about sufficiently, and that goes for most of the book.

One in Every Deck, the adventure provided at the back of the book, has a good plot and plenty of possibility for drama. For my tastes it is a little too firmly rooted in the campiness of the TV series, and the characterisation of the Joker is limp, but nevertheless it's a fine backup to the game, and if nothing else should act as a catalyst to referees' imaginations.

There is one other thing I should mention about this game: it's one of those annoying creations which is infested by abbreviations. Not only APs, but AV/EVs and OV/RVs litter the text, making it seem more like an old-fashioned computer programming language manual than an invitation to the realm of imagination. I can't help but feel that novice gamers (at whom the game is clearly pitched) will find this alienating. Apart from this the introductory aspect is fairly well handled.

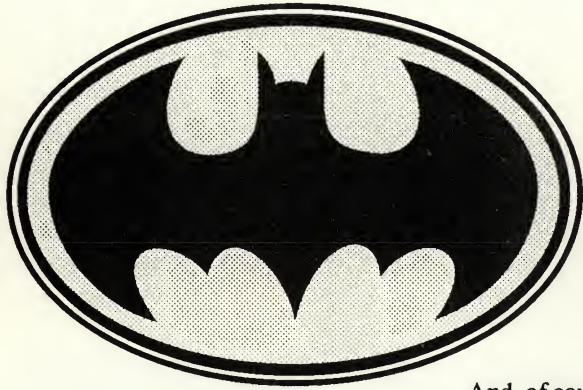
So, it's not the perfect medium to simulate the better Batman comics, but it has potential. I regard it as an oddity in my collection. If I ever need to run a game for one person, and that person happens to be a Batman fan, I'll get the game down and run it, ignoring Hero Points and a few other annoyances. As a 'standard' run-every-week rolegame campaign, however, it's limited to a DC Universe superteam mentality, which has precious little to do with the Batman myth.

Paul Mason



## COMICS REVIEW

# Best of the Batman



**Paul Mason**

*So, everyone knows all about Batman, right? Well, if all you've seen are the TV programmes, you might have a pleasant surprise awaiting you. The movie might be a good start, but there's better in store – mostly thanks to a gent by the name of Frank Miller.*

## The Dark Knight Returns

We'll start, just to cock a snook at chronology, with the comic which revitalised Batman, and sowed the seeds for the success of the movie. This is the last tale of Batman, set in a grim future in which nuclear confrontation is a distinct possibility. If you don't consider yourself a comic fan, or even if you don't think you like comics at all, I'd still recommend you give *Dark Knight* a go.

An aging but still determined Batman comes out of retirement and quickly finds himself enmeshed in the same old conflicts. This time, however, the stakes are higher. He's not a sharp as he once was, and increasingly aware of his own mortality. The world he has returned to isn't the same old Gotham City, either. Law-

lessness is rife, and superheroes have been forced to 'disappear' by a government worried about its populace's reaction to the *übermenschen* – the 'giants who walk the earth'. Commissioner Gordon is being replaced by Ellen Yindel, who promises that her first act in her new job will be to issue a warrant for the arrest of the Batman.

And, of course, the Joker is involved. Unchanged by the passing years, his madness is no more apparent than here. Here, too, are other DC Comics favourites, miraculously transformed into *people*. The Green Arrow is a revolutionary pacifist, Robin is a young girl, Catwoman the proprietor of an escort agency. Comics fans will appreciate the way Miller adroitly handles these characters; non-comics fans will simply find that the book contains excellent characterisation.

If you come to the *Dark Knight* expecting rip-roaring adventure, you may be disappointed. Instead you get a complex story examining the social and political implications of vigilante activity. You can ignore this and still find a gripping story, but if you want to look deeper you can find substance. However, my advice is not to be too dogmatic about considering the Batman the hero of this book. Depending on your point of view it's quite possible he's the villain and that Superman (who has never been better than his appearance in this comic) is closer to being the hero. After all, the two end up in an extraordinary fight with each other, and it's *not* resolved by one of those irritating 'Oh, I'm sorry, I seem to have made a mistake' endings that usually attend battles between superheroes.

Finally, a word about the art. Frank Miller collaborated with Klaus Janson to produce a rich, chunky look which suits the material far better than would a clean, traditional comics look. If you're new to

*From The Dark Knight Returns*





comics, be sure to devote plenty of attention to the art: Miller has mastered the art of integrating words and pictures, and the tale is spun by neither one nor the other, but by a perfect fusion of the two.

### Batman: Year One

Frank Miller also wrote *Batman: Year One*, which will make for an interesting comparison with the movie. Here he teamed up with David Mazzucchelli, who has applied modern visual storytelling techniques to an art style which harks back to the early days of comics, when Batman himself was but young, and such greats as the Spirit stalked the streets. Again the style matches the storyline: simpler, cleaner, and more direct. Some people I know prefer *Batman: Year One* to the *Dark Knight*, and if you feel you're more interested in an exciting story that captures the dark feel of the movie then this would probably be the best bet. As in the movie, Batman's origin is brought right up to date, yet the fundamentals remain the same.

My only gripe about this comic is that Miller undermines the character of Gordon by making him too physically tough. Beating up a Green Beret, well, maybe, but beating up a Green Beret who's wielding a baseball bat? It's a shame, because apart from this the characterisation of Gordon as an 'honest cop keeping his integrity in a corrupt police force' is excellent.

Reading this story after *Dark Knight* is an illuminating experience, and although the styles are different, the two sit well together.

### The Killing Joke

The third prestige comic (that is, a story written for a special format rather than for the comic itself) I'm going to look at is *The Killing Joke*, written by Alan Moore, Britain's greatest comic writer, and drawn by Brian Bolland, one of our finest artists. Hopes were astronomically high for this comic when it came out, and a lot of people were disappointed. Moore wrote it before *Dark Knight* came out, and for some reason never seems to come to grips fully with the either the Batman or Joker characters.

The problem with Moore's approach is that he has tried to make the two central figures human – and has been a little too successful. Moore seems to suggest that the Joker is simply a loser tipped over the edge by a personal tragedy and his famous dip in the vat of acid. His 'madness' is a sane way of viewing the world he in-

habits. It's an interesting theory, but somehow the Clown Prince of Crime loses something as a result.

However, as a macabre story about the Joker attempting to defeat Batman by driving Commissioner Gordon insane it has some fine moments. Since it uses the same visual approach as Moore's classic *Watchmen* it would be a good place to get into Batman comics if that's all you've read so far.

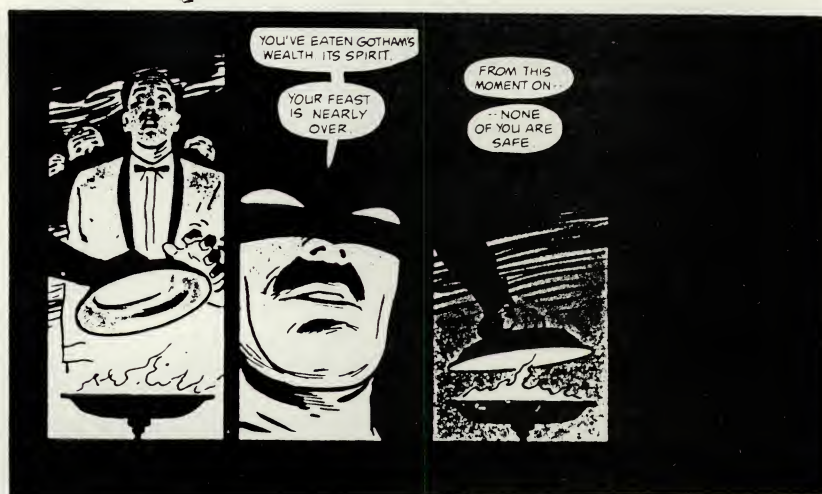
### The others

There are several other Batman stories available in graphic novel format. Some of these are taken from the run of the Batman comics themselves, including *Death in the Family* where an Opportunity Knocks style vote from readers led to Robin being clubbed to death by the

Joker. A pretty dismal effort this, including some moronic Cold War-style propaganda directed against Iran.

The others – especially those with art by Neal Adams – are far better, but best left until you've tried out the greats mentioned above to see whether you have a taste for graphic storytelling. As source material for the Batman rolegame, these will be essential, and we can be grateful to the graphic novel format for saving us the trouble of having to collect comics for weeks on end in order to get a complete story! GI

*Batman graphic novels are published by DC (though some are also published in the UK by Titan) and are available from better book shops, and from comic shops everywhere. Prices range from £5.95 to £9.95.*

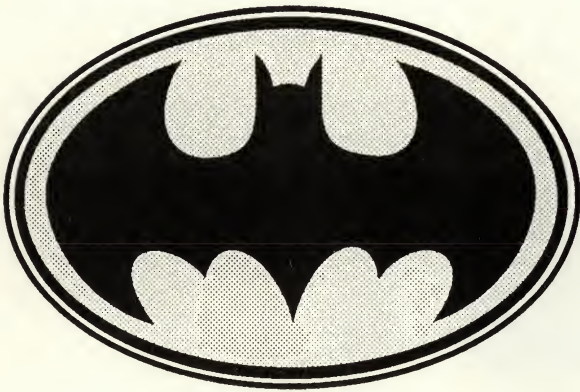


From *Batman: Year One*



## FILM REVIEW

# Batman



Directed by Tim Burton  
Starring Michael Keaton,  
Jack Nicholson, Kim Basinger

The reaction of American critics to this mega hyped flick has been one of, well, overreaction – probably stemming from relief that it isn't just a *Superman* clone. There's been talk of a 'dark vision', a 'psychological study', a film 'too sophisticated for the mass market'. Like we're dealing with Chekov, or something. Forget it. What we have here is an entertaining confectionery which wouldn't even be that were it not for Jack Nicholson's performance as The Joker. What prevents the film being any more is the exaggerated emphasis on the love affair between the wimpy Vicki Vale (Basinger) and the semi-comatose Bruce Wayne (Keaton).

Basinger does what she can with the character, but it can't be much fun having to bawl your brains out after being banged by a bat. She's not exactly screaming all the time, but it's close. Amazingly, she's supposed to be a war photographer.

## TONGUE IN TIGHTS

The choice of Keaton as the eponymous hero was a controversial one, mainly because of his lack of inches. How come no one mentioned his lack of charisma? As the caped crusader this is no problem. Let's face it, even George Bush would have a certain presence in that *mask* and *those* tights. As Bruce Wayne, though, he comes across like a TV actor, forever expecting the zoom close-up for that

quizzical expression to convey emotion. Acting by numbers.

Since *Chinatown*, Nicholson has been living on his reputation, but here he's back to his best form as the grumpy gangster transformed into acid prankster by an unscheduled dip in a vat of the stuff. Gone is the dreadful mugging of *Prizzi's Honour*. Having all the best lines helps, but it's the way you tell 'em. A word

too for the tongue in cheek cameos by Jerry Hall as a narcissistic slut on the make (did she realise it?), and New York mayor Ed Koch as a mayor on the take (you can be sure he did).

## GOOD GOTH

Another plus factor is the sets: a spectacular collision between art deco and American Gothic. Well, this *is* supposed to be Gotham City. The Batmobile too is a splendid creation, not least in its ability to function independently of a driver. Even in this mode it would give Ayrton Senna a run for his money.

Burton, who also co-wrote the film, directs with a flair for set-pieces; the Joker's street party when he and his henchman are bopping away to Prince's *Trust* is one of the highlights of the film. The energy which such scenes generate make it even more mystifying why he chose to revolve much of the plot around the (helpless) woman-in-peril syndrome, and the lacklustre affair between Vale and Wayne.

Any film costing \$50m is going to be a compromised entity, unless your name is David Lynch, and there are signs of significant cuts, most notably when the soppy Vale appears in the batcave seemingly out of nowhere, and discovers the dual nature of her erstwhile bonking partner in a mind bogglingly anti-climactic scene. Like discovering the Pope's a catholic. In-

terestingly, Burton claimed that he made the movie in such a way that any studio cuts would make a nonsense of the narrative. It worked.

## BUMMER IN THE SUMMER

In America, 'summer films' have come to form a kind of sub-genre, each competing against the other for the holiday dollar. As the most recent competitor in this bizarre ritual *Batman* has more integrity than most. Indeed, there's a certain bravado about the hip references considering that generally, the first thing a budget meets on the way up are the risks on the way down. Better than one could have hoped, but not as good as one would have wished, *Batman* comes close to turning the Hollywood compromise into an art-form.

Brian Walker





**LETTERS**

If only . . .

If a game isn't in the mind  
It can't be invented

If a game isn't invented  
It can't be designed

If a game isn't designed  
It can't be printed

If a game isn't printed  
It can't be made

If a game isn't made  
It can't be distributed

If a game isn't distributed  
It can't be in the shops

If a game isn't in the shops  
It can't be sold

If a game isn't sold  
It can't be played

If a game isn't played  
It can't be reviewed

If a game isn't reviewable  
It can't be in a games magazine

If a games magazine subscriber doesn't  
get his mag  
He will not renew his subscription

If a magazine has no subscribers  
It will soon have no money

If a magazine has no money  
It will soon be only a memory! (Like *GM*)

The 13 'Ifs' make a very good moral  
game. And another 'If':

If a magazine misses the sell by deadline  
The staff will soon be on the breadline!

(With apologies to Rudyard Kipling)

**Roy Sheppard**

Lucky 13 Games  
London NW5 1RY

*If we had more advertising,  
Then we'd be able to employ more staff*

*If we had more staff,  
Then we'd be able to come out on time*

*If we came out on time,  
Then we wouldn't receive waffle like this.*

**Star treatment**

The general and rolegame reviews in *GI* are fine, but the same is not true of just some of the board wargame spots. Perhaps this is due to the smaller proportion of really knowledgeable board wargamers in the UK, compared, say, to the USA. 'Tally Ho!' looks fine to the unwashed I mean uncritical readers (*sic*), but I feel it lacks completeness (unusual

**REBOUND**

Write to: *Games International*, Lamerton House, 23a High Street, Ealing, London W5 5DF

for *GI* . . . what about *Flying Circus* and *Rolling Thunder*?) and, worse, erudition (sorry, look it up!). *Foxbat & Phantom*, *Spitfire*, *Top Gun* and *Battle of Britain* may be worth 2 stars put together, but not each. *Richthofen's* is like the *Queen Mother* – old, out-of-touch, not used much anymore, but too much of a classic of a bygone era for the one star treatment. *Flight Leader* similarly should not be considered rubbish, but 3 stars for *Sopwith! Knights of the Air* is the best *simulation* of WW1 air combat, but so complex and slow. I love it 'cos of the zepellin (*sic*), what fun. Speaking of which, I have it on good authority that Iron Mike Siggins' nickname has nothing to do with Japan or Finland – it is his call sign when fully inflated – *Sierra Ultra MIKE Oscar*. (It's cheaper than powered flight!)

**Andrew R Daghli**  
Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JA

*Differences of opinion, no matter how lacking in erudition, are always welcome.*

**Der Fuhrer is found**

I am replying to the Rev Duncan Myers' request for information regarding a game called *Fuhrer* in issue 6. The game in question is called *Der Fuhrer* by Ed Constant, © The Little Soldier, 1976. No address is given in the rules. I got my copy from Esdevium Games (I think) some ten years ago at a Science Fiction convention, so perhaps they could furnish more information.

Failing that, I would happily send photocopies of the rules and charts – basically all that's needed to play the game – but I

don't know how this fits in with copyright law (*It doesn't!* – Ed).

**Kevin Haynes**  
Tonbridge, Kent TN10 3HP

**Star struck**

Keep up the good work with your magazine. It makes a nice change to have a general games magazine back on the newsstands (memories of reading *Games & Puzzles* when I was younger).

I think your general format is about the right mix of general games and role-playing games. Even though I don't play role-playing games I'm still interested in reading the reviews. I like the in-depth reviews, summary reviews, RIP, game variations and the desert island games. I'm not so keen on the conference and workshop reviews.

On games reviews, I remember *G&P* included a sliding scale for luck/skill and complexity ratings. Can you also include something similar in addition to your star rating system?

Can you include more in-depth reviews of 'classic' games? I found the articles on *Britannia* and *Die Macher* very interesting and both games are now marked down as games to get for the coming long winter evenings.

More summary charts for games, please. You included a two page article outlining about 25 games with star ratings and one sentence summaries. Very useful for assessing whether a game may be worth buying without having read a full review, and I can check if the review agrees with my assessment of the game.

**Martin Bond**  
Bradley Stoke, Bristol BS12 0AJ

*Thanks for your kind comments. The ratings system you suggest is one that we considered but rejected on the grounds that these areas should be covered in the review itself. The next 'summary chart' will appear in our Christmas issue.*

**No love**

Recently I bought a game called *Sports Illustrated Pro Tennis* which I consider to be a complete waste of time and money. I quite enjoy playing games solo, as this game was obviously designed to be, but . . . the game does not work because the cards do not work. The back of the box claims the players have been 'scientifically evaluated in five areas of play.' Perhaps I should take lightly what



is written on the back of boxes, but I feel 'scientifically evaluated' should have meant serve-volley and 'back-liners' could have been differentiated in some way. They aren't. The differences between players is too big - no one outside the top ten takes more than the odd game off Number 1 Connors. Number 50 Phil Dent serves faults half the time. Even I don't do that, and I'm several million places lower in the world. Have you come across the game? If so, do you share my opinion, or am I missing the point somewhere?

**C M Read**  
Sheffield S6 2WZ

*Not having played Pro Tennis we can't really comment on its qualities. However, we have nothing but the highest praise for the other games, such as Speed Circuit, in Avalon Hill's Sports Illustrated series.*

**Manic**

Perhaps John Harrington should compare the price of **Share Mania** with the prices of other games before he criticizes the quality of its components (GI, July 1989). A lesson in product costing might not go amiss as well.

The typical cost of many games is about £15, and even this does not guarantee high quality components or mean that there is not a do-it-yourself element before the game can be played. **Share**

**Mania**, at £6.99, can hardly be expected to match them.

Peg boards and specialised dice would greatly increase the price of the game, but would they necessarily improve **Share Mania** as a game? And are such high quality components justified if, say, they last far longer than the playing life of the game?

Harrington's wardrobe is irrelevant to readers of the review, and his example tells them nothing new. Gamers have long been aware of the perils of mixing baggy sleeves with stacks of counters; most have sensibly resorted to the uniform of T-shirt and slightly baggy stomach. Hazards more likely to be relevant are seas of lager from adroitly handled cans or glasses, especially when temperatures have been hitting more than 80 degrees fahrenheit. Or does Harrington write his reviews from the safety of a refrigerator?

**Ian Marsh**  
Putney, SW15 3JX

**Crossed lines**

After reading Derek Carver's 'Desert Island' choice, I decided to check out his number one, 'Lines of Action', in my copy of Sid Sackson's *A Gamut of Games*. I was surprised to find it clearly attributed to Claude Soucie, and not Robert Abbott, who is, however represented later in the collection by a game

called 'Crossings'. I thought I should set the record straight.

**Iain Alexander**  
Reading, RG3 2BL


**Promises, promises**

I must admit to considerable annoyance over one thing. If you promise a review of a game please print it, or put in an apology. GI #6 page 30: '**Space Hulk**: Full review next issue' (lost in space, perhaps), same issue page 38, 'Mike Siggins goes to France', he obviously got lost along with the Attactix reviews.

Any chance of you reviewing *S&T* games?

**A Seddon**  
Levenshulme, Manchester M19 3NG

*Regarding Space Hulk, please see footnote on page 9. As for the promised Attactix reviews, we had the same problem in that we rang the company four times to find out where the promised review copies were. We eventually got them from their distributor Hobbygames, but by this time the deadline had passed. Mike Siggins missed the boat too, but makes up for it this issue. Sorry.*

*S&T games? Maybe the odd one, but they really don't have the circulation in the UK to warrant consistent coverage.* 

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